United Nations S/PV.8194

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8194th meeting

Wednesday, 28 February 2018, 10.10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Tachco

Agenda

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (S/2018/110)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (S/2018/110)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/164, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Côte d'Ivoire.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/110, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make a statement before the voting.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): In its capacity as penholder on the issue on today's agenda, our delegation has the pleasure of presenting draft resolution S/2018/164, which has been submitted for our consideration with a view to the renewal until 28 February 2019 of the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS). This balanced draft reflects the realities on the ground, and its crafting enjoyed the full and comprehensive cooperation of all.

My delegation wishes to thank, on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, all of the States members of the Council that participated in a constructive spirit during the consultations and negotiations leading to the elaboration of this draft resolution. Our hope is that the draft, which enjoys the support of all member States and of other stakeholders, will meet with the approval of the Council so that it can be adopted by consensus.

In essence, the draft resolution takes note of the Secretary-General's report on Guinea-Bissau dated 9 February 2018 (S/2018/110), extends strong support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and proposes an extension of the mandate of UNIOGBIS for a period of one year, until 28 February 2019.

Through this draft, the Security Council voices its concern vis-à-vis the persistent political and institutional crisis that has been stoked by the main Guinea-Bissau political actors. In this regard, the Security Council urgently calls on the stakeholders to put the interests of the people above all other considerations and calls upon the Government of Guinea-Bissau to adopt concrete measures to ensure peace, security and stability in the country.

Furthermore, the Security Council stresses the importance of holding legislative elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019. To that end, the Council calls for implementation of the recommendation of the strategic review mission concerning the need for UNIOGBIS to refocus its efforts by availing itself of the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and by supporting, inter alia, the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) road map, while facilitating an inclusive political dialogue, the national reconciliation process and the upcoming electoral process, with a view to ensuring the holding of inclusive, free and credible legislative elections in 2018, within the timetable set forth in the mandate of the Council. It further commends the crucial role played by the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau and welcomes the extension until 31 March 2018 of its mandate.

In that same vein, the Council supports the efforts of ECOWAS and of the African Union to secure an expeditious settlement to the crisis plaguing Guinea-Bissau and welcomes the decision of ECOWAS of 4 February 2018 imposing sanctions on those obstructing the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, which is the sole consensus-based framework for arriving at a lasting solution to the crisis. The Council also commends international partners, including the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, the European Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries for their concerted efforts to step up cooperation with the Government of Guinea-Bissau.

Lastly, the Council extends its willingness and readiness to take additional measures in the event of any deterioration in the situation in Guinea-Bissau.

To conclude, my delegation wishes to formally call on the Security Council and bilateral and multilateral

partners to continue to support Guinea-Bissau, in the interests of the civilians in that country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2404 (2018).

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make a statement after the voting.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): After several weeks of discussions and negotiations, the members of the Council have decided to extend the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) for another year, thereby expressing the commitment of the United Nations to continuing to participate in the process of resolving the political and institutional crisis in Guinea-Bissau. The efforts of the international community to find a peaceful solution to the crisis must persuade the leaders of Guinea-Bissau to give clear signs of their willingness to overcome their differences and restore sustainable democratic governance.

My Government, led by his Excellency Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, continues to reiterate the need for the political actors to fully implement the Conakry Agreement. The appointment of Mr. Arturo Da Silva as Prime Minister continues to be questioned and rejected by the Parti africain pour l'indépendance de la Guinée et de Cabo Verde, which makes it difficult, on the one hand, to form an inclusive Government, and on the other to do the necessary updating of the electoral census and hold the election by the Assembly National of the members of the National Electoral Commission, which are preconditions to holding the democratic elections in 2018 and 2019.

The extension of UNIOGBIS is justified by the need to provide technical assistance to the national authorities and to expedite and reform the legislation necessary for the maintenance of the constitutional order, the promotion and protection of human rights and the organization of legislative and presidential elections. The United Nations team should continue to provide strategic advice and support to the national authorities and stakeholders in the implementation of justice reform strategies, with a view to establishing civil, military and penitentiary systems, in accordance with international standards, and in fighting the drug trafficking and transnational organized crime affecting the subregion.

Regional and subregional initiatives play an important role in resolving the political stagnation in Guinea-Bissau. Equatorial Guinea again commends the role of mediation assumed by the African Union and the series of consultations carried out in mid-January by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with the main political actors to assess the implementation of the Conakry Agreement, and supports the measures taken by ECOWAS against certain individuals who are obstructing a peaceful solution to the prolonged crisis.

However, Equatorial Guinea stresses the fact that there is no open military confrontation in Guinea-Bissau but a deep misunderstanding among the political actors that has led the country to an institutional blockade. In such an environment, it is difficult to achieve consensus among all parties, as stipulated in the Conakry Agreement, as we are seeing in the case of the recent appointment of Prime Minister Arturo Da Silva.

Equatorial Guinea, as a member of the Security Council, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, and as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2048 (2012) concerning Guinea-Bissau, is of the view that sanctions should not be the only way to unblock the current situation in the country. There must be pragmatic and direct involvement to help the political actors reach a compromise solution that will pave the way towards the preparations for this year's upcoming legislative elections. To that end, the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea proposes that the members of the Security Council maintain close contact with the political actors of that country with a view to finding a committed solution

to end the impasse created by the lack of consensus in decisions taken by the parties.

The year 2018 should bring a sense of renewed hope and the reaffirmed commitment of the international community to continue helping Guinea-Bissau and its people and prospects for economic growth. I conclude by acknowledging ECOWAS, the African Union and UNIOGBIS for their efforts to find a solution to the crisis in that brotherly country.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): The United States wishes to thank Côte d'Ivoire for its steadfast work as penholder for resolution 2404 (2018), and we also wish to thank our fellow Council members for their collaboration during the negotiations.

The United States believes that the resolution we have just adopted will bring about a real improvement to the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau. With a streamlined mandate, the mission can focus even more on its good offices to help deliver an end to the stalemate that has not only frustrated the Council but, more importantly, has hurt the citizens of Guinea-Bissau for far too long.

That stalemate was created out of selfishness and intransigence. We again call on President Vaz, Prime Minister Da Silva, the leader of the Parti africain pour l'indépendance de la Guinée et de Cabo Verde, Mr. Pereira, and others in the Guinea-Bissau leadership to work together for the sake of their people and forge consensus to get Government working again. Guinea-Bissau's leaders have had many chances to fix the Government gridlock since the Conakry Agreement was signed in October 2016. They have ignored those chances and taken actions that purposefully contradicted the Agreement.

The bold move taken by the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) to push those impeding the process through targeted sanctions comes from a desire to induce them to become part of the solution instead. As it did in The Gambia, ECOWAS is proving to be an example for regional organizations everywhere in its willingness to take significant challenging steps to improve lives across West Africa. As I said in the Chamber two weeks ago (see S/PV.8182), time is running out and our patience has expired. Guinea-Bissau's leaders must make this time different, and come out and do what is right.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation supported the adoption of resolution 2404 (2018), extending the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau. In taking that decision, we were guided by the importance of maintaining consensus within the Security Council. We also took into account the hopes expressed by our African partners.

In that regard, we wish to stress that the acknowledgment contained in the document of instances of restrictions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States on a number of Guinea-Bissau actors does not signify their approval by the Council. Once again, we note the fact that the only legitimate international sanctions are those imposed by the Security Council, in line with Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. We object to any attempt, through the Council, to introduce wording that would distort that fundamental principle in international law or use it to legitimize unilateral restrictions, regardless of any noble intentions that may be advanced.

Our approach to the matter is well known. Unilateral sanctions, especially those imposed in addition to measures already agreed by the Security Council, are a path to nowhere. Not only do they not help to resolve crises but, as practice shows, they only serve to further escalate them.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): We thank Côte d'Ivoire for its arduous work in trying to ensure the support of the Security Council for the efforts of the West African region to resolve the deadlock in Guinea-Bissau. We continue to support and endorse the mediation efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its imposition of sanctions. ECOWAS has consistently demonstrated that, when united, it has the ability to act as the region's power-broker, as it did in the crisis in The Gambia last year. Like then, the Council should also firmly demonstrate its support for ECOWAS in assuming that role and responsibility.

The African Union has unequivocally supported the efforts of ECOWAS and has, through its Chairperson, asked us to follow suit. The political actors in Guinea-Bissau should realize that resolution 2404 (2018), adopted today, speaks in clear words of the Council's readiness to take additional measures to respond to the possible further worsening of the situation in the country. We hope that it is a message that will resonate

in Guinea-Bissau and be heard by ECOWAS and the African Union.

The resolution supports the concerted action taken thus far to achieve tangible progress in finally resolving the Guinea-Bissau crisis. Let us all continue to support the concerted action of the five actors on the ground: ECOWAS, the African Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, the United Nations and the European Union.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.8195

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Wednesday, 28 February 2018, 10.35 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
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	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
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	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/138)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017) (S/2018/138)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2018/138, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017).

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: We have received a lot of questions about resolution 2401 (2018), which the Security Council adopted on Saturday, 22 February, and its demand for a cessation of hostilities without delay for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria. I want to start today by answering the questions we have received. Is the United Nation ready to deliver to people who need humanitarian assistance? Yes. We have convoys ready to go to 10 besieged and hard-to-reach locations, including a 45-truck convoy with aid for 90,000 people to Douma and eastern Ghouta. Are you ready to support medical evacuations from eastern Ghouta? Yes, we are working very closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other health partners on that. Has resolution 2401 (2018) been implemented? Is there a ceasefire in Syria? No, and no. Have you got any inter-agency cross-line convoys through to hard-to-reach or besieged areas? No. Have you been given permission to access any of those locations? No. Have you received the necessary facilitation letters for convoys? No. Have there been any medical evacuations? No. Have any civilians left eastern Ghouta? No. Is there any actual improvement in the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta since the adoption of the resolution demanding, as it did, unimpeded access? No. Can you deliver assistance in eastern Ghouta during a humanitarian pause between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. local time? To quote the ICRC Middle East Director, who spoke about that yesterday: "It is impossible to bring a humanitarian convoy in five hours." Agencies now have years of experience in that area, and it can take a day simply to pass checkpoints, even when the parties have agreed. The goods then have to be offloaded.

If there has been no humanitarian access since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) on Saturday, what has happened in the past few days? More bombing, fighting, death, destruction, maiming of women and children, hunger and misery — in other words, more of the same.

On 26 February, two days ago, airstrikes, barrel bombs and artillery shelling were reported across eastern Ghouta, including in Harasta, Shafuniyeh, Otaya, Hosh Eldawahreh, Al-Ashari, Jobar, Beit Sawa, Hazerma, Hannnura, Nashabiyeh, Sagba and Douma. Reports indicate that at least 30 civilians, including women and children, were killed. In Shafuniyeh, 14 people, including three women and four children, were reportedly killed and many others injured by airstrikes. Eighteen civilians, including drivers of ambulances, women and children, were reportedly received at health facilities in Shafuniyeh with difficulties breathing, consistent with the use of chlorine. One child reportedly died as a result. On the same day, two workers from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were reportedly killed as a result of shelling on the besieged enclave. It was also reported that two health-care facilities in Saqba were taken out of service by airstrikes. In the past few days, shells have also reportedly continued to fall on Damascus city from eastern Ghouta.

Since 18 February, more than 580 people are now reported to have been killed due to air and ground strikes in eastern Ghouta, with many more than 1,000 people injured. At the same time, hundreds of rockets fired from eastern Ghouta into Damascus have reportedly killed 15 people and injured more than 200.

I now want to update the Security Council on the situation in other parts of the country.

In Idlib, fighting continues to kill and injure civilians, destroy civilian infrastructure and result in large population movements. Since December, an estimated 385,000 people have been displaced, with many civilians moving north. Half of Idlib's population was already displaced. People are being forced to move yet again, with each disruption increasing their vulnerability. Civilians are concentrated in an ever-smaller area. Many are forced to live in makeshift camps or in the open air. Formal camps are overwhelmed, operating at up to 400 per cent of their capacity. The response is being stretched to its limits.

We are receiving reports of civilian deaths and injuries and of restriction on the movement of many civilians as a result of military operations in Afrin. Those who risk moving continue to be stopped at exit points by the local authorities in Afrin, preventing them from accessing safer areas. We believe that, so far, approximately 5,000 people have reached the surrounding villages and Aleppo city. Tens of thousands are believed to be displaced within Afrin. The Turkish authorities have emphasized to us their willingness to facilitate humanitarian access. We would like to see aid convoys operated from Damascus. However, to date that has not been agreed by the Syrian side.

In Raqqa city, conditions remain unsafe for the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Among those trying to return home, 637 people have been injured and more than 125 killed by unexploded ordinance since last October. Medical and other essential services are absent and access for humanitarian workers to the city remains precariously limited because the conditions are so dangerous. As I have said before, demining activities need to be accelerated as a matter of urgency.

Humanitarian access for the United Nations and its implementing partners in Hasakah was limited for much of January due to the increased restrictions placed by the local authorities. United Nations convoys were blocked from travelling to the northeast from elsewhere within the country. The delivery of aid already in local warehouses was also blocked. While an agreement to resume humanitarian deliveries was reached on 30 January, that agreement will end in March. NGO partners continue to deliver goods and services across the north-east. However, sustainable access for the United Nations is critical. Any protracted interruption of humanitarian assistance and services in the IDP sites may drive the displaced people back to areas where they are not safe.

Earlier this month, the United Nations received clearance for the first assessment visit to Deir ez-Zor after it had been under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for three and a half years. More than 100,000 people live in the town despite that fact that it is estimated to be 80 per cent destroyed. The infrastructure is almost completely destroyed, particularly in the central and the eastern areas, where ISIL was in control. In coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the United Nations has dispatched 78 trucks carrying food, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, education, water and sanitation items since last September, when ISIL was driven out.

Finally, we remain concerned about the tens of thousands of people stranded in Rukban, in south-eastern Syria. We continue to seek the necessary agreements for convoys of life-saving assistance to them.

As I said last week (see S/PV. 8186), there was a severe reduction, of nearly 40 per cent, in cross-line access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in 2017 as compared to 2016. On average in 2017, over the entire 12-month period, we reached 165,000 people a month with cross-line convoys. That was completely inadequate. So far this year, we have reached a total of only 7,200 people through a single small convoy earlier this month. In other words, we were reaching more than 50 times as many people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas last year as to date this year. The main reason for the reduction in the number of convoys has been the consistent refusal by the Government of Syria to provide the necessary approvals and facilitation letters to support delivery.

As the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/138) details, while we continue to reach millions of people in urgent need in areas controlled by the Government of Syria and through the cross-border programmes mandated in resolution 2393 (2017), assistance across conflict lines to millions of people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas has completely collapsed in recent months. Unless that changes, we will soon see even more people dying from starvation and disease than from the bombing and shelling.

The United Nations remains focused on reaching those most in need throughout the country, including the 5.6 million people considered to be in acute need. The needs-based approach means that the United Nations will continue to seek to deliver aid and to

provide services to millions of people in a principled manner regardless of where they are located. More than half of those in need are in Government-controlled areas. However, millions more people are not.

What the Syrian people need has been made abundantly clear — protection, access to basic goods and services, an end to sieges and respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Security Council has unanimously supported all such needs in adopting resolution 2401 (2018).

I started today by answering questions that we have received regarding resolution 2401 (2018). I would like to end with a question for the Security Council. When will the resolution be implemented?

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Security Council following the comprehensive briefing by Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock.

In two weeks, we will mark the beginning of the eighth year of the Syrian conflict. There are no words to express our frustration over the collective failure of the international community to end this war, but that frustration is nothing compared to the suffering and destruction visited ceaselessly upon the Syrian people. We are here again today because the brief respite that the Council unanimously demanded only days ago in resolution 2401 (2018) has not materialized, as Mr. Lowcock just described. The air strikes, shelling and ground offensives continue. There are even reports of yet another chlorine gas attack. What we need is the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), and that is not happening.

Nearly seven years since the peaceful protests in Dar'a and the reaction that set in motion what would eventually become all-out war, we are still grasping for a political solution, which is the only way to end the bloodletting. The Secretary-General has called eastern Ghouta a hell on Earth. The United Nations will continue to work with Syrians and the international community to help bring about a durable political solution. We will also continue to demand that all the parties involved in the conflict respect international humanitarian law — the rules of war — and protect civilians. We will continue to demand the release of those who have been arbitrarily detained and the end of enforced disappearances. We will continue to forcefully call for justice and accountability. Those responsible for the catalogue of horrors that mark daily life in Syria, including chemical and terrorist attacks, torture and sexual violence, sieges and attacks on hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure, must be held accountable. Those outrages continue in large part because the perpetrators have so far enjoyed impunity.

As the Secretary-General said earlier this week, "Security Council resolutions are only meaningful if they are effectively implemented". The United Nations acknowledges Russia's announcement of a daily five-hour pause for eastern Ghouta. In addition to Mr. Lowcock's briefing and what the International Committee of the Red Cross has stated, we respectfully remind all parties that resolution 2401 (2018) demands the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid for a minimum of 30 consecutive days. The Secretariat and relevant agencies are united and pulling in one direction towards the immediate and continuous cessation of hostilities that can be sustained beyond 30 days for unimpeded aid delivery. We also urgently need to get humanitarian aid and services in and the sick and critically wounded evacuated from besieged eastern Ghouta and other locations. We are ready to deliver.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly reminded parties of their absolute obligation under international humanitarian law and human rights law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Earlier this month, Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock told the Council (see S/PV.8186) in no uncertain terms that that is an obligation, not a favour. He has just updated us all on the humanitarian situation and provided an update on the United Nations readiness to deliver aid and services, and the tireless efforts of humanitarians to reach all in need, wherever they are. But right now we must address the particular needs of those in besieged eastern Ghouta.

Resolution 2401 (2018) affirms that the cessation of hostilities shall not apply to military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front, and

> "all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida or ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council". (*resolution 2401 (2018), para. 2*).

In our view, that rightly maintains the parameters set out in resolution 2254 (2015), but there must be

a frank assessment of what that means in relation to the humanitarian tragedy that we are witnessing in eastern Ghouta.

First, we condemn all violations of international law by all parties, including shelling from eastern Ghouta, which has injured or killed civilians in Damascus. The scale of the Government's indiscriminate military attacks against eastern Ghouta — an area with a civilian population of 400,000 — cannot be justified based on targeting Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters. Efforts to combat terrorism do not supersede obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law.

Secondly, the United Nations has not seen any confirmation by the Government of Syria of its commitment to implement resolution 2401 (2018), although at the resolution's adoption Syria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations said,

> "As a State, we bear a responsibility towards our citizens and we have a sovereign right to counter terrorism" (*S/PV.8188, p. 12*).

Thirdly, yesterday the Head of the Syrian Negotiations Committee transmitted to the Secretary-General a letter on behalf of the three major non-State armed opposition groups — Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham — and civil groups in eastern Ghouta regarding their full commitment to the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). Specifically, they committed to ensuring the necessary environment for United Nations humanitarian access as well as,

> "to expel all elements of Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, Jabhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qaida and all who belong to these groups from eastern Ghouta".

Fourthly, the United Nations has no independent verified reports that those three non-State armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta created a coordination centre, as has been alleged regarding Jabhat Al-Nusra, nor has the United Nations seen any public announcement by those groups of such a centre. Jaysh Al-Islam has denied that claim. What the United Nations can verify is that non-State armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta, over the past 24 hours, have expressed their readiness in writing to evacuate Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters. Previous negotiations on that issue among those groups and key members of the International Syrian Support Group humanitarian task force in Geneva and Damascus have not resulted in success.

Alleviating the tragic situation in eastern Ghouta has the Council's full attention. Yet we cannot forget that resolution 2401 (2018) demands a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria. Violence continues in Afrin, Idlib and the eastern part of the country. Council members have heard about the humanitarian challenges and suffering of the people in those areas as well. I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize that developments in those areas will undoubtedly render the situation in Syria even more complex. There will be no sustainable solution if the Council's resolutions are not implemented. That will require that the parties step back from the brink and fulfil their obligations to end the fighting in Syria. All our efforts will be in vain if there is no serious investment in a political solution.

As Council members are aware, resolution 2401 (2018) calls on all Member States to use their influence with the parties to ensure the implementation of the cessation of hostilities. The United Nations calls for a renewed commitment by all concerned Member States to work seriously to implement the cessation of hostilities. The United Nations also cautions against drawing the Organization into monitoring exercises. That has been tried in the past without success — not for lack of trying — but in the absence of political will among Member States to underpin United Nations efforts. Member States, especially those working within the Astana and Amman arrangements, should use their resources and clear influence over the parties to ensure the implementation of a sustained cessation of hostilities throughout Syria.

The conflict in Syria continues to threaten regional and international stability because the warring parties believe there is a military solution. There is not. The United Nations remains convinced that a political solution is the only way forward. Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is pressing forward on facilitating the establishment of a constitutional committee in Geneva, as part of the overall intra-Syrian political process towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), for which the United Nations requires the positive and constructive engagement of both negotiating delegations. Special Envoy De Mistura will need the full support of the Council and the international community as a whole if the United Nations efforts are to have a chance of reinvigorating a serious and meaningful political process. I trust that he will have that support.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): I make my remarks today on behalf of Sweden and Kuwait as co-penholders for the humanitarian track of the Security Council's work on the situation in Syria.

I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock once again for a very sobering update. We share his sense of urgency following the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) last weekend to fully take advantage of the 30-day pause so that the United Nations and its partners can dispatch life-saving aid convoys and begin medical evacuations. Since the resolution's adoption, we have been asked, as penholders, when the resolution would take effect and to whom it would apply. We are very clear: the resolution took effect upon its adoption and applies to all parties across the entire country. The clock is ticking. There is no time to lose.

Let me also sincerely thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his briefing today. We share his deep concern concerning reports of the flagrant lack of compliance with the ceasefire in eastern Ghouta.

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all members of the Council for their constructive cooperation, which enabled the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). The resolution represents decisive and meaningful action by the Council in response to the calls from the United Nations, the humanitarian community and, above all, the civilian population in Syria. However, the value of a resolution is not in its adoption, but in its implementation. We must now all build on the spirit of cooperation that led to the resolution's adoption and work together to ensure that it is enforced. Compliance with the resolutions of the Security Council is not optional; it is an obligation of all Member States.

The humanitarian community stands ready to do its part. Having adopted this resolution, the Council must do its part. For the next few weeks, let us seize the opportunity that this resolution represents and focus on its implementation. We would like to make four concrete recommendations on the way forward.

First, existing de-escalation agreements must be complied with most urgently in eastern Ghouta. We call on the three Astana guarantors to spare no effort to achieve this end. Resolution 2401 (2018) clearly demands that all parties cease hostilities; air strikes, the ground offensive and shelling must stop.

We take note of the initial positive indications from armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta that they are ready to comply with the resolution. We also note their commitment to expel the Al-Nusra Front from the area. We must build on this, and we call on those with influence over armed opposition groups to secure their commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Clearly the Council has demanded in resolution 2401 (2018) that the Syrian Government cease all military operations without delay.

Secondly, as Mr. Lowcock has told us, the United Nations and its implementing partners in the field are ready to commence life-saving convoys and medical evacuations. We urge the Syrian authorities to immediately issue facilitation letters for the convoy to Duma to proceed this week as a necessary first step. It can no longer be business as usual; the Council has demanded weekly convoys to all areas and populations in need.

Thirdly, existing structures to strengthen compliance with and monitoring of the cessation must urgently be activated. We look to the Chairs of the Task Force on the Ceasefire of the International Syria Support Group to undertake more frequent meetings, which are needed at least on a weekly basis. The Amman operations room should also be utilized. We see merit in making a clearer link between monitoring mechanisms and the Security Council.

Fourthly, the Council must remain actively seized of this matter. Sweden and Kuwait will request an open briefing from the incoming presidency on the Secretary-General's report on implementation and compliance that is due 15 days after the resolution's adoption. We should also stand ready to meet and take appropriate action at any time necessary so as to ensure implementation of this resolution.

Finally, we welcome any efforts to de-escalate violence and to allow and facilitate humanitarian access in Syria, but let us be clear — resolution 2401 (2018) demands a 30-day, nationwide ceasefire, with immediate access for weekly convoys and medical evacuations. A five-hour ceasefire does not meet the requirements of the resolution. The resolution is not primarily about the evacuation of civilians, but demands humanitarian access to civilians and medical evacuations. The

cessation of hostilities must be implemented fully and without delay. It is imperative that all parties uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law at all times.

Last Saturday's unanimous action reinforced the legitimacy and credibility of the Security Council (see S/PV.8188). Today's briefings demonstrate that there is no time to rest on the laurels of this achievement. We must now move without delay to ensure our action here last Saturday is translated into the relief and assistance expected by the millions of people affected by this conflict. It is now incumbent on all the parties and all those with influence over the parties to spare no effort and use all channels available in order to advance the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018).

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I want to thank Mark Lowcock and Jeffrey Feltman for their very clear briefings.

I would like today to focus my remarks on our shared road map, namely, the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), which we adopted unanimously last Saturday (see S/PV. 8188). On behalf of France, I would like to express three main messages today.

My first message is that we must not pay lip service. The situation on the ground remains dramatic and has not improved in recent days. Since the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), the offensive against the eastern Ghouta has continued relentlessly. France, of course, strongly condemns these indiscriminate bombings, which affect inhabited areas and civil infrastructure. In this context, the disastrous humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. No United Nations convoy has been able to reach the eastern Ghouta or any of the other besieged areas, no emergency medical evacuation has been carried out, no siege has been lifted. The Syrian regime is maintaining its stranglehold on the civilian population and is methodically pursuing its policy of destruction. More than 400,000 people remain under siege in eastern Ghouta, including 130,000 children. The demand sent by the United Nations to authorize a priority convoy for Duma, the main city in eastern Ghouta, has not received any response from the Syrian authorities to date.

My second message is this. The resolution adopted by the Security Council on 24 February makes very specific demands on the parties. Hostilities must cease without delay in order to establish a lasting humanitarian truce for at least 30 days, in order to allow both the delivery of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of the wounded and sick. Let me stress this point. These demands are perfectly clear and cannot be distorted or reinterpreted. Contrary to what some would have us believe, the demands made by the resolution are absolutely clear. Our responsibility today is to implement, fully and in their totality, the provisions that we have unanimously adopted. If we do not that, what credibility can be given to our commitments? What credibility can be given to Security Council resolutions?

The United Nations and its partners tell us that they are ready to deliver aid to the people of eastern Ghouta and other priority areas. There is therefore not a minute to lose because every minute that passes can turn lives upside down.

At the conclusion of difficult negotiations, the Council managed to unite in the face of the gravity of the humanitarian situation and the escalation of the Syrian conflict in recent months. We must now work together, in the same spirit of unity, to effectively implement on the ground the resolution we unanimously adopted. This is my third message.

Following yesterday's meeting in Moscow with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, France is putting forward four concrete proposals for making progress and for doing so without delay.

The first is to ensure that all parties implement the cessation of hostilities that resolution 2401 (2018) demands. I note that the three main opposition groups present in eastern Ghouta as well as Nassar Al Hariri, head of the High Negotiations Committee of the Syrian opposition, have written to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Council to state that they would respect the truce. It is therefore urgent in the extreme — if I can put it that way — that the Damascus regime also unambiguously express its willingness to respect the Council resolution and to formalize it in writing.

We have taken note of the Russian proposal of a daily five-hour humanitarian truce. It is a positive first step, but it is insufficient. We must go further. Resolution 2401 (2018) demands of the parties a minimum period of 30 consecutive days of cessation of hostilities. Respecting that demand is non-negotiable. That goal requires more than just symbolic declarations or political posturing. At a minimum, it requires that humanitarian personnel be allowed to do their work.

These workers are used to taking risks on a daily basis, but the parties must allow them to do their work. Given that the opposition groups have formally committed to doing just that, the regime must do so as well, and without delay. To that end, supporters of the regime, beginning with Russia, must bring the necessary pressure to bear.

Our second proposal, by way of a demand, pertains to the need to immediately open the relevant, clearly identified checkpoints — beginning with Wafideen — in order to allow the access of priority convoys of the United Nations. We therefore demand that the Syrian authorities submit without delay the necessary letter to facilitate the deployment of humanitarian convoys.

Thirdly, it is extremely urgent to allow medical evacuations for the most critical cases, giving priority to children. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent indicates that 1,065 people need emergency medical evacuations. We have not a minute to lose.

Finally, France considers it essential to create a monitoring mechanism to ensure the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and compliance with the resolution by the parties. We are working diligently to establishing that mechanism now.

Those are the French proposals to address the urgent need to put an end to the bombing and protect civilians, who beyond resolution 2401 (2018), are protected under international humanitarian law. It is also crucial to intensify our efforts to reach a political solution in the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015). It is the only way out of the conflict and the only way to prevent a looming escalation of tensions. France will not deviate from that path. The overall credibility of the Security Council and the responsibility of each of its members are crucially at stake today in the context of the Syrian tragedy.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-Generals Lowcock and Feltman for their clear, factual briefings and for reiterating to all of us on the Security Council the ongoing horror of the conflict in Syria — and in particular in eastern Ghouta, because that is where it is clear the situation is most dire by a huge order of magnitude.

It was five days ago (see S/PV.8188) that we sat in this Chamber and all of us raised our hands in support of a 30-day ceasefire, which we hoped would provide some relief to Syria's people. That was a desperately needed step, one that came too late for many. In eastern Ghouta alone, Médecins Sans Frontières reported that at least 630 people were killed and 3,000 injured in the week before resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted, with women and children representing nearly 60 per cent of the wounded and 50 per cent of the deceased. We also continue to condemn attacks on Damascus from eastern Ghouta.

Let us recall the demands of our resolution. It called for at least a 30-day ceasefire without delay to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuation. "Without delay" means right now, immediately — that there should be no delay. We all voted for those demands and we committed to using our influence to ensure that. In response, Russia has declared a five-hour daily humanitarian window. That is not what the Council demanded, nor what Russia agreed to use its influence to ensure. A five-hour window has not delivered and cannot deliver any meaningful improvement on the ground. Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has made clear that the United Nations cannot get humanitarian convoys in and out within that time frame, as has the International Committee of the Red Cross. Humanitarian pauses of a few meagre hours are no substitute for a sustained ceasefire, which is vital to ensuring the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations. If Russia is able to deliver a five-hour pause, let it deliver a 24-hour pause, as it agreed on Saturday.

Let us now take stock of the situation in Syria, and specifically in eastern Ghouta, where the situation is at its most desperate. Let us review if any real change has occurred in the past five days. Has the resolution been implemented? Has there been a ceasefire? Has there been any delivery of humanitarian aid or any medical evacuations? Has the adoption of the resolution brought any relief to the people of Syria?

The fighting has not stopped. All of the main armed opposition groups have committed to the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). The Al-Assad regime has not, and has in fact ignored the resolution we adopted. Reports of attacks and air strikes by pro-regime forces continue. Twenty-two air strikes reportedly took place even during Russia's so-called humanitarian pause. And, as if it could not get any worse, there have been disturbing reports of the use of chlorine gas. Doctors in eastern Ghouta reported to the Syrian-American Medical Society that 16 patients, including six children, were suffering from symptoms

indicative of exposure to chemical compounds, following an alleged regime attack on Sunday — only one day after the resolution was adopted. Since Saturday not a single aid convoy has been able to access eastern Ghouta to provide relief to the desperate civilians. The World Health Organization estimates that 1,000 people are now in need of medical evacuation from eastern Ghouta. None have been evacuated since the resolution was adopted.

The consequences of the failure to implement the resolution are clear: the casualties continue to rise and the horror continues. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports at least 14 civilians, including three children, were killed on Sunday. In short, in the words of one doctor from eastern Ghouta, "Nothing has changed."

It is the responsibility of us all to ensure that resolution 2401 (2018) is enacted in full. In the words of my Foreign Secretary, the Al-Assad regime must allow the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid, in compliance with resolution 2401 (2018), and we look to Russia and Iran to make sure this happens, in accordance with their own promises.

I implore all those with influence over the Syrian regime to act now to ensure that the ceasefire that they supported in the Chamber is implemented in full and immediately. To do anything less is an affront to the Council, the United Nations and the international system that we live by. We will continue to monitor the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and commit to returning to the Council regularly until we see it respected.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): Every time the Security Council attempts to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, we take a small leap of faith. I say "we" in reference to the Security Council. I speak of faith because all Council members and most States Members of the United Nations still genuinely try to uphold the responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, including abiding by and fully implementing Security Council resolutions. Despite the grim updates we heard today, we must maintain the hope that we can help the Syrian people. If we do not have that hope, we are wasting our time here.

Just four days ago, the Security Council took another leap of faith. We adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding a 30-day ceasefire for all of Syria, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to deliver desperately needed food and medical supplies, and immediate and unconditional medical evacuations based on need and emergency. Our goal was clear and simple. The Al-Assad regime and its supporters have been pummelling eastern Ghouta, where 400,000 people live under siege and constant bombardment. Resolution 2401 (2018) demanded that the assault stop. That was the Council speaking in one, clear voice. The opposition groups operating in eastern Ghouta have made clear their commitment to the ceasefire. The Free Syrian Army, Jaysh al-Islam, the Al-Rahman Legion and Ahrar al-Sham all committed to implementing resolution 2401 (2018).

Against all odds, we hoped that Mr. Al-Assad might respect the resolution, cease hostilities and allow unfettered humanitarian access to all those who need it. Against all odds, we hoped that Russia would use its influence to ensure Mr. Al-Assad's commitment to resolution 2401 (2018). Once again, that hope has been crushed because so far, for the people of eastern Ghouta, nothing has changed. Despite the unanimous call for a ceasefire, the regime's attacks continue unabated. Hundreds of Syrians have been killed or injured since we adopted the resolution on Saturday. What is worse is that less than 24 hours after we demanded the ceasefire, there were reports that the Al-Assad regime again used chlorine gas as a weapon. Such attacks demonstrate Syria's complete and utter contempt for the Council and the United Nations.

On Monday one human rights organization reported 18 attacks that defied the Council's demands. On Tuesday another organization reported at least 23 air strikes and four barrel bombs in eastern Ghouta. Syrians on the ground are reporting that Tuesday was worse than Monday with regard to strikes from the regime. How can that be? On the humanitarian front, as Mark Lowcock stated, the Al-Assad regime has allowed no deliveries of assistance into eastern Ghouta — not one. Opposition groups in the area have expressed their commitment to allowing aid in, but the Al-Assad regime still says no.

Since we adopted resolution 2401 (2018), Russia has announced a daily five-hour humanitarian pause in the aerial bombing of civilians in eastern Ghouta, which is cynical, callous and in flagrant defiance of the demands of resolution 2401 (2018). The cessation of hostilities is for at least 30 days — every day, all day. Russia does not get to unilaterally rewrite the terms of the resolution. It negotiated it and voted for it. Russia,

Iran and the Al-Assad regime are not even trying to hide their intentions. They are asking civilians to leave eastern Ghouta on the false premise that they can then attack anyone left in the area as much as they would like. Let us call the actions what they are. Mr. Al-Assad and his allies want the civilians of eastern Ghouta to walk into the arms of a regime that has been attacking and starving them for the past seven years. That is not a humanitarian gesture. They do not care if the 400,000 people of eastern Ghouta suffer, as long as they can continue to pursue their military and political objectives.

We know what Iran, Syria and the Al-Assad regime are doing because they have done the same thing in the past. It is the same playbook they used for Aleppo in 2016. Once again, we, including Russia, demanded in the Security Council Chamber that Mr. Al-Assad stop the bombing, and yet Russia, Iran and Mr. Al-Assad continue their attacks, defying the wishes of the Council and of the international community. Because we have been through this before, we know what Russia will say today. It will say that there are terrorists in eastern Ghouta so that the Al-Assad regime can bomb as ferociously and indiscriminately as it wants and kill as many civilians as it wants. That defies the principles governing the laws of war. The Al-Assad regime should not be allowed to bomb and starve its own people into submission under the guise of counter-terrorism. That Russian argument makes a mockery of the Council and of international law.

Russia also accuses the United States of somehow being responsible for humanitarian crises in Syria, but such accusations are ludicrous. The United States does not block humanitarian aid in any area. In fact, the United States has provided more than $7 billion in humanitarian aid in response to the crisis. The Council must not fall for Russia's misdirections. When the ceasefire was adopted unanimously on Saturday, including by the Russians, Ambassador Haley stated that our resolve to stand by our demands in the resolution would be tested. It has come to pass. Despite everything that has happened since Saturday, we are not casting aside the ceasefire in Syria; just the opposite. We would like to redouble our efforts in the Security Council to implement it, but the only way to change the situation on the ground is for all of us — every single one of us — around the table and each State Member of the United Nations to speak the truth about what is happening.

The past four days should show us that when it comes to demanding a ceasefire, it is not enough to say that all parties should show restraint or commit to the ceasefire because in eastern Ghouta there is only one party dropping barrel bombs, gassing the Syrian people and denying deliveries of food and medical assistance. It is the Al-Assad regime, operating with the full support of Russia and Iran.

On Saturday we stated that the only way to restore the credibility of the Council was to make the ceasefire a reality. Russia, Iran and the Al-Assad regime have not complied with the Council's demands and have not silenced their guns. Unless we take action, they will stop at nothing to destroy eastern Ghouta and we will again fail to help the Syrian people.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First, let me thank Under-Secretaries-General Lowcock and Feltman for their briefings.

In my statement I will address three points: implementation, implementation and implementation.

First, I will speak about the implementation of the cessation of hostilities. Since the Council adopted resolution 2401 (2018) on Saturday, civilians are still dying in eastern Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria. The humanitarian disaster continues worsen. We need a full, nationwide cessation of hostilities and we need it now. The Russian proposal for a humanitarian corridor and pauses of five hours per day cannot be a substitute for a humanitarian pause of 30 consecutive days, as demanded in resolution 2401 (2018). Those five hours do not meet the obligations under the resolution and are not enough for the United Nations to be effective in delivering aid to the entire area of Ghouta, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock just stated.

We call upon the parties to the conflict and on those with influence on the parties to show decisive action and stop the violence. As Under-Secretary-General Feltman stated, three armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta have announced that they are committed to fully implementing resolution 2401 (2018). We expect the regime to do the same. The air strikes, the shelling and the shooting must stop. For the credibility of the Council, it is crucial that its resolutions be fully implemented. That is the obligation of all States Members of the United Nations, under the Charter.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands repeats the call made by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, to the Astana guarantors. She called on the Foreign Ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey to

> "take all necessary steps to ensure that the fighting stops, the Syrian people are protected and that urgent humanitarian access and necessary medical evacuations are taking place".

My second point is about the implementation of humanitarian access. Resolution 2401 (2018) calls for sieges of populated areas, including eastern Ghouta, to be lifted immediately, and demands safe, unimpeded and sustained access for humanitarian convoys. As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock just explained, the United Nations stands ready with 45 trucks to deliver essential aid to eastern Ghouta. But the necessary facilitation letters are still lacking, and the security conditions do not permit those deliveries. At this point, more than 1,000 people are in urgent need of medical care, but they are still trapped in eastern Ghouta. If they are not given the care they need in hospitals in Damascus or elsewhere, they may die. The United Nations and the Security Council have consistently pleaded for these medical evacuations, and yet there are still no developments with regard to them. We also need to see access to aid for those fleeing the fighting in Afrin. More generally, there should be delivery of humanitarian aid to the areas that are not under Government control. As Mr. Feltman just said, we should reach all who are in need, wherever they are.

My third point is about implementing the protection of civilians. The exception on the cessation of hostilities in paragraph 2 of the resolution allows targeted action against terrorists who are designated as such by the Council. However, that does not mean that absolutely anything is allowed. International humanitarian law applies to all military combat operations and counter-terrorism actions. The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be respected in all circumstances. The civilians in the conflict must be protected. There is talk of humanitarian corridors for civilians who want to leave eastern Ghouta, but evacuations should always be voluntary. We are concerned about the possibility that humanitarian corridors will be used for forced population transfers. Civilians cannot be forced to leave, and neither should they be forced to stay. If voluntary evacuations do take place, we will call on the United Nations to monitor them.

Currently, the most urgent humanitarian situation is in eastern Ghouta and Idlib, but needs remain high elsewhere in Syria as well. We welcomed the January delivery of aid to Rukban, but we want to stress the importance of sustained access and a durable solution. As others have said today, the demining activities in Raqqa should be increased, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands is doing its part in that regard. The media coverage of the issue of the exploitation of Syrian women in exchange for aid is very disturbing. There should be no tolerance of such behaviour, as the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have already said. The probity of any United Nations implementing parties should be beyond any doubt.

In conclusion, we must ensure that resolution 2254 (2015) is fully implemented. There can be no military solution to the conflict, and we call on all the parties to engage seriously in the United Nations-led political process as a matter of urgency. The suffering of the people of Syria has lasted for more than seven years. For the sake of the millions of women, children and men trapped in this horrendous war, it is high time that all parties started putting the protection, interests and well-being of the Syrian people on the top of their agenda. Yesterday, my Minister, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, said that humanitarian access and the protection of civilians are cornerstones of international humanitarian law. They are part of our shared values and shared humanity. The Security Council must do justice to those values and to our shared humanity.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you for convening today's meeting, Mr. President, and for the briefings by Mr. Lowcock and Mr. Feltman on the situation in Syria.

On Saturday, when we adopted resolution 2401 (2018) after long and complex negotiations, we highlighted the commitment that Council members have shown to achieving a humanitarian ceasefire in Syria. As we said at the time, it will be crucial to closely monitor its proper implementation and to maintain the Council's unity with regard to its responsibility to protect the civilian population, in line with international law and international humanitarian law.

Four days in, we are still being forced to lament and condemn the attacks on civilians and to reiterate

our calls for the immediate and comprehensive implementation of resolution 2401 (2018). As the Secretary-General has pointed out, Council resolutions make sense only if they are effectively implemented. The credibility of the Security Council as a whole, and of those of its members with the greatest potential influence on the ground in particular, is at stake. In the light of this, we want to emphasize that the cessation of hostilities that the Council has demanded clearly covers the whole of Syrian territory, including eastern Ghouta and Afrin, and should last for a minimum of 30 days. If we are to ensure that, in our view we should mobilize the International Syria Support Group's Ceasefire Task Force. It is essential to ensure that all the parties to the conflict comply with the ceasefire provided for in resolution 2401 (2018), and that the Council is able to closely monitor that compliance. In that regard, we support the four recommendations outlined by Sweden and Kuwait.

We must remind the Syrian authorities of their responsibility to protect their people, and we firmly condemn the military operations in eastern Ghouta and other areas of the country that have continued even after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). However, we welcome the strenuous efforts of the Organization, and of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in particular, to prepare 45 trucks carrying supplies and ready to enter eastern Ghouta as soon as the necessary permits are granted. The first report on the implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) will be presented in less than two weeks, and we hope that it will be able to inform us that the humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian conflict has been alleviated, because we cannot wait any longer. It is the Security Council's duty to continue working relentlessly to achieve what we have all unanimously agreed on.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I very much appreciate today's clear and informative briefings by Mr. Lowcock and Mr. Feltman, and I would like to share a few thoughts from Poland's point of view.

Since the Council's adoption on Saturday of resolution 2401 (2018), we have been seeing yet more extremely worrying developments on the ground. As I said in my last statement on the subject (see S/PV.8188), the heavy fighting in Syria has unfortunately not only continued but is increasing. In that context, we should persist in our efforts to take every possible action to ensure the resolution's full and safe implementation. We call on all to work to alleviate the suffering of civilians, including children, by giving them free and safe access to humanitarian assistance. That should include voluntary evacuation, which should be strictly overseen by the United Nations and its implementing partners and based solely on medical need, in order to ensure that the process is genuinely voluntary. We would like to stress that all the relevant actors should use all their influence to help to improve the conditions on the ground immediately.

We urgently call for a cessation of hostilities throughout all of Syria for 30 days, as stipulated in resolution 2401 (2018). In that context, it is also important to note that the cessation of hostilities may also offer an opportunity for the talks being held under United Nations auspices in Geneva to gain momentum, so that a political solution can finally be reached. For that reason, we call on all parties to fulfil their commitments to the existing ceasefire agreements.

It should be emphasized that the implementation of the ceasefire announced by resolution 2401 (2018) should ensure the safe entrance and stay of humanitarian and medical personnel without prejudice to their health or life. When such personnel enter hard-to-reach areas, we should know precisely how long they can stay while delivering assistance under the ceasefire, otherwise their lives could also be in danger.

In conclusion, let me stress the importance of maintaining the unity of the Council on the question of the implementation of humanitarian resolutions. The unanimous adoption of the resolution is just the beginning of the process. We call on all actors with influence on the ground to take all steps necessary to ensure that the fighting stops, that the Syrian people are protected and, finally, that urgent humanitarian access is enabled and that the necessary medical evacuations can take place.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for their respective briefings.

Once again, we would like to say how appalled we are at the terrible situation suffered by the Syrian people, as the past two months have been the most violent since the start of the conflict, and civilians, primarily women and children, are the ones that are suffering the gravest consequences of this intensification of the war. We call the attention of the Security Council to the continuing

violations of international law, especially international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as these attacks have targeted civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and homes.

My delegation would like to express once again its gratitude to the delegations of Sweden and Kuwait for their work in promoting the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which imposes a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria, which is as urgent as it is necessary. We urge the parties to implement the resolution immediately in order to speed up access of humanitarian assistance without any restrictions, allow urgent medical evacuations and the entry of humanitarian convoys, and ensure the protection of hospitals and medical facilities, especially in eastern Ghouta, Idlib and north of Hama.

We wish to underscore once again the need for continued cooperation and coordination among the Syrian Government and the various humanitarian assistance agencies, so that the delivery of humanitarian assistance can be effective, especially in hard-to-reach areas, and to prevent administrative obstacles from derailing or negatively affecting the deployment of the required humanitarian assistance.

We also stress the need to begin, as soon as possible, humanitarian mine-clearing in areas that require it, in particular in the city of Raqqa, to allow the return in dignified and safe conditions of people who were forced to flee their homes because of the conflict.

As we have stated previously, we believe that if our aim is to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people in the face of armed violence, the Security Council has the major challenge of maintaining its unity so as to ensure that this organ's decisions are implemented. We reiterate that the solution to this conflict can be found only through an inclusive political process based on dialogue and coordination, led by the Syrian people and for the Syrian people, that will make it possible to reach a peaceful solution among all parties involved. With this in mind, we wish to highlight the various forums for dialogue, specifically the Astana process, at which de-escalation zones were agreed on that must be respected by all parties. We will be closely following the next round of the process.

We wish also to highlight the other opportunities for dialogue that could make it possible to reach further compromises to achieve a definitive end to hostilities, such as the Sochi national dialogue, which is aimed at strengthening the Geneva political process, with respect for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and its right to choose its own political, economic and social system without any external pressure or interference.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire thanks Mr. Jeffrey Feltman and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their respective briefings on recent developments in the situation in Syria following the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2401 (2018), on the humanitarian situation in Syria. My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his unstinting efforts as part of the political dialogue among the Syrian parties with the aim of arriving at a lasting solution to the protracted crisis ravaging that country.

In that regard, my country welcomes the holding of intra-Syrian peace talks on 25 and 26 January in Vienna in the framework of the Geneva process, followed by the talks held in Sochi on 29 and 30 January. My delegation cherishes the hope that the proposals stemming from the Sochi talks, including the establishment of a committee tasked with drawing up a new constitution, will receive consistent attention from the international community, as part of the concerted quest to find a lasting solution to the crisis in Syria.

The situation on the ground is deeply alarming. Military operations that include the use of non-conventional weapons are leading to mass displacements of people, the loss of human lives, injuries and the destruction of public infrastructure, including hospitals and schools. The grave humanitarian crisis spawned by the fighting led to the adoption by the Security Council this past Saturday, 24 February, of resolution 2401 (2018), with a view to the cessation without delay of hostilities for a 30-day period to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need as well as medical evacuations.

My delegation notes with regret that the adoption of the resolution did not contribute to restoring calm on the ground. The ceasefire proposed was short-lived, despite the numerous appeals for a cessation of hostilities. Even the very minimum one called for by the Russian Federation, an ally of the Damascus Government, on Monday 26 February did not lead to a positive response. Air raids and rocket launches continue on the ground, thereby obstructing the work of humanitarian personnel.

We deplore the ongoing loss of life among humanitarian workers — 22 United Nations personnel and 66 staff members or volunteers of the International Red Cross — and we deplore also the material damage that has been wrought, which includes the destruction of 25 vehicles and 44 facilities, according to the information we have received. Nonetheless, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the fact that United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners have managed to assist people in need by conducting 1,567 deliveries.

My country reaffirms that a resolution of the crisis in Syria must be part of an inclusive dialogue and political process, as set out in the road map under resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, my country calls for full compliance with the 30-day ceasefire, in accordance with resolution 2401 (2018), which will not only allow humanitarian actors to respond to critical emergencies but also create the conditions for a return to the negotiating table by all parties to the Syrian crisis. To that end, Côte d'Ivoire urges the members of the Security Council to unite and surmount their differences in order to send a message of hope and solidarity of the international community to the Syrian people.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As usual, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman just gave us detailed briefings on the humanitarian and political situation in Syria. Those were the first briefings to be delivered to the Security Council following the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), on 24 February. I take this opportunity to thank both Under-Secretaries-General, as well as to acknowledge the willingness of the United Nations and its partners to send convoys of trucks with the necessary humanitarian aid and begin medical evacuations as soon as conditions on the ground allow.

As Secretary-General António Guterres said two days ago in his statement before the Human Rights Council, "Security Council resolutions are only meaningful if they are effectively implemented". The Republic of Equatorial Guinea hopes resolution 2401 (2018) is meaningful in that way in order to relieve the affected population of the suffering it has endured, especially in eastern Ghouta, that is, we hope for it to be immediately implemented.

We want to reiterate that the Syrian conflict has no military solution. The opponents therefore must take a seat at the negotiating table to engage in direct and frank dialogue, without exclusions, however complicated it may be to do so. It must be the Syrians who determine the future they want for their country. The international community must redouble its efforts in making sure the opponents engage in negotiations, and the countries that have influence need to wield it to establish trust, with the ultimate goal of achieving lasting and just peace in Syria. We commend the intention expressed by the largest opposition groups — Jaysh Al-Islam, Faylaq Al-Rahman and Ahrar Al-Sham — to respect the ceasefire, and we invite all the other parties involved to take the same decision.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea believes that the only reason that the humanitarian situation remains of concern is because the opponents do not agree on negotiating to reach a peace agreement, which consequently causes more civilian victims, leads to the destruction of hospital facilities and hampers humanitarian aid operations. The conflict has recently intensified around the town of eastern Ghouta and some other parts of Syria, which has resulted in civilian casualties, the destruction of a considerable number of medical and relief facilities and the obstruction of humanitarian relief operations led by the United Nations.

Equatorial Guinea is very touched and horrified by the critical situation the Syrian people are experiencing, and we must not show indifference to so much pain and suffering. It is therefore imperative that the parties to the conflict implement and uphold the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially the most recent, resolution 2401 (2018), including allowing access to humanitarian aid, halting hostilities and ultimately, cooperating with the United Nations in its efforts to assuage the conflict and make humanitarian operations effective by ensuring aid deliveries reach the affected populations and evacuating the sick and seriously injured so that they can receive the necessary medical care. The international community, while striving to help Syria, must not forget the neighbouring countries that have welcomed refugees and shown a spirit of solidarity worthy of praise.

I would like to conclude my statement by expressing well-deserved tribute to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all those who work with it on the ground for their bravery and determination in fulfilling their humanitarian mission to deliver aid to

those in need. We encourage them to persist in their noble efforts.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I join others in thanking Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for their comprehensive and sobering briefings.

Kazakhstan welcomed the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). That document should be urgently implemented to ensure a comprehensive ceasefire in Syria. The ceasefire regime should be implemented fully, especially in the areas of eastern Ghouta, southern Idlib and northern Hama, to resolve their long-accumulated acute humanitarian problems, deliver aid to the most difficult regions and evacuate the wounded and sick.

Turning to the situation on the ground in the country, according to our humanitarian colleagues, over the past 78 hours and to our deep regret, military operations continued to be reported in besieged eastern Ghouta, resulting in deaths, including women and children. Attacks on Damascus from eastern Ghouta are also continuing. To our great disappointment, a Syrian Arab Red Crescent warehouse in a Damascus suburb was reportedly struck by shelling. During the same period, attacks on the city of Damascus and the governorate resulted in 14 deaths and 214 injured.

We are glad to know that the United Nations has mobilized and is ready to immediately support life-saving aid convoys in several areas in eastern Ghouta. We therefore call on the Council members and the wider United Nations membership to assist the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in operationalizing the delivery of humanitarian assistance in eastern Ghouta, as well as in carrying out hundreds of medical evacuations. We echo the United Nations calls on all parties to facilitate unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to all people in need throughout the country and take all measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, as required by international law. It is equally important to ensure, in close coordination with OCHA, the protection of medical and humanitarian workers. We must also insist that parties support United Nation agencies in the fulfilment of their mandates. In that context, Kazakhstan proposes that all-round assistance be provided to the inter-Syrian negotiations through the Astana process and that positive developments be taken advantage of to improve the humanitarian situation.

My country stands for a solution in Syria based on resolution 2254 (2015), the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and agreements on the de-escalation zones reached through the Astana process. We regret the lack of full agreement and close coordination among the key stakeholders in managing the Syrian crisis. We also attach great importance to strengthening the inter-Syrian political dialogue with greater support from the world community. Lastly, Kazakhstan notes the need to establish closer interaction among the leading stakeholders in Syria, in particular between the Russian Federation and the United States, to improve the political process and ensure positive changes on the humanitarian track.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for their briefings. China commends the United Nations aid agencies for their humanitarian relief efforts in Syria. The security situation in various parts of Syria, including Damascus and eastern Ghouta, has escalated recently, causing significant civilian casualties. We sympathize profoundly with the suffering of the Syrian people and condemn all acts of violence against innocent civilians. The parties concerned should take immediate measures to de-escalate the tensions in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) demonstrates the consensus and unity of its members on the humanitarian issue in Syria. We appreciate the positive efforts of the parties concerned. China welcomed Russia's announcement by Russia that it will implement the ceasefire measures and assist with the evacuation of people from conflict areas. We call on the parties in Syria to put an immediate end to hostilities in accordance with the resolution, actively coordinate with United Nations relief efforts and ensure safe humanitarian corridors in the relevant areas.

A political settlement is the only viable solution to the Syrian issue. The Syrian National Dialogue Congress was recently held successfully in Sochi and has had positive results. Special Envoy de Mistura is making ongoing efforts to advance the Syrian political process. The international community should support the Syrian parties in resuming dialogue and negotiations under the auspices of United Nations mediation as soon

as possible and in seeking a solution that is acceptable to all parties through a Syrian-owned and -led political process. That is the only way to fundamentally ease the humanitarian situation in Syria and end the suffering of the Syrian people without delay.

Terrorist organizations are still launching attacks in Syria, causing significant civilian casualties and impeding United Nations humanitarian relief efforts. The international community should strengthen its cooperation on counter-terrorism, adopt unified standards and resolutely combat all terrorist organizations that are designated as such by the Security Council.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman for their comprehensive briefings.

We would like to express our gratitude to the United Nations and its humanitarian partners for their continuing efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to millions of Syrians. As Mr. Lowcock said, the humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to be a devastating one. Military activities in various parts of the country, including eastern Ghouta, have affected the ability of the United Nations to deliver lifesaving assistance to all in need. As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/138) says, the conflict and other obstacles have had a disastrous effect on the level of humanitarian access.

In order to address those challenges and to alleviate the Syrians' suffering, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), demanding the institution without delay of a cessation of hostilities for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria so as to ensure the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and services and medical evacuations. As we all emphasized on Saturday after welcoming the resolution's adoption (see S/PV.8186), what is now required is its full and comprehensive implementation with the immediate engagement of all parties and those with influence on them. Of course, we understand and appreciate the fact that the United Nations is ready to provide immediate humanitarian aid across the country. However, as Mr. Lowcock just highlighted, there are still military activities in various areas. In that regard, we call on all the parties to fully implement resolution 2401 (2018) for the sake of the Syrian people, who have continued to bear the brunt of the conflict for almost eight years.

We appreciate any measure taken by Member States to facilitate the implementation of the ceasefire, including the humanitarian pause and humanitarian corridor announced by the Russian Federation. At the same time, it is obvious that more needs to be done to fully implement the resolution. It is therefore imperative to take urgent and coordinated action to bring about an immediate ceasefire, thereby ensuring that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have safe, sustained and needs-based access in order to deliver humanitarian aid to all Syrians in need of assistance.

In conclusion, it is ultimately a comprehensive, Syrian-led political solution, facilitated by the United Nations on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015), that can sustainably end the humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Under-Secretary-General Feltman for their briefings. By the way, at the outset I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to ask Mr. Lowcock where the United Nations is getting its evidence and data on deaths in Damascus, for instance. According to the Syrian authorities' information, for example, just since 22 January, 12 people have died in Damascus, while the United Nations figure is 11 for the whole month. Where is he getting his information from? The White Helmets, maybe?

Today, as has been usual recently, the United States delegation devoted its statement to Russia. It told us that it knew what we were going to say today, which it does not. And I am pleased about that, because it means that it did not see our statement before the meeting began.

On 24 January, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2401 (2018), in an important decision aimed at improving the humanitarian situation in Syria, especially in areas where the danger of military clashes remains or there are obstacles of one kind or another to the civilian population's access to essential assistance. Today many questions have been asked — emphatic questions, rhetorical questions, questions aimed directly at us. We answered the questions asked of us during our discussion at the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018). There are a lot of people here who like to pick citations from the resolution that they like and forget the ones that do not suit them. If I may, I will quote two extracts from it, from paragraph 1 and paragraph 10.

(*spoke in English*)

> "Demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay, and engage immediately to ensure full and comprehensive implementation of this demand by all parties, for a durable humanitarian pause for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria, to enable the safe, unimpeded and sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and ... medical evacuations".
>
> "[U]nderscores the need for the parties to agree on humanitarian pauses, days of tranquillity, localized ceasefires and truces to allow humanitarian agencies safe and unhindered access to all affected areas in Syria".

(*spoke in Russian*)

Has everyone read the resolution? We have said, and we will say it again, that any sustained pause must be preceded by an agreement between the parties on de-escalation. The demands that military activity end overnight are either the result of a misunderstanding of the realities or a deliberate exploitation of this human tragedy. The statement by the United States delegation simply rewrote resolution 2401 (2018). What sort of joint effort, such as the Permanent Representative of France called for today, can we talk about in these circumstances after what we heard today in the United States delegation's statement? Russia has announced the establishment in eastern Ghouta of daily five-hour humanitarian pauses. Everything possible is being done to ensure that they function successfully. Specifically, medical and temporary accommodation posts have been equipped, ambulance teams organized, motor transport provided. We call on the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other recognized humanitarian organizations to join these efforts.

However, on the very first day, the militias took advantage of the announcement of the pause to go on the offensive. The same thing happened on the second day. The mortar shelling continued, including in the humanitarian operations corridors. Not a single person was able to leave the danger area. We took note of the relevant letters submitted on behalf of the illegal armed groups. We were told previously that the most convenient way of informing Council members about them was being sought. It has been found and it is indeed highly original — directly through the work e-mail addresses of all the political coordinators, meaning that someone deliberately sent the relevant contact information to dubious individuals from the ranks of the radical Syrian opposition. It is very similar to the situation that occurred when information about the closed negotiations on humanitarian resolutions became available to Western media agencies.

However, we hope that the opposition leaders are serious and that their deeds will match their words. We are expecting clear guarantees in that regard from the militias' foreign sponsors, many of whom are seated around this table. The first thing that is needed is a definitive repudiation of the terrorist organizations. It has to be understood that terrorists continue to be a legitimate target of military operations, and we will not stand on ceremony with them. Overall, we have to decide on the most effective way to neutralize Jabhat Al-Nusra in eastern Ghouta. Why can't some members show a willingness to cooperate on that issue? Or do they not want to?

The information background to this issue is overheated to the point of no return. If we had not adopted resolution 2401 (2018), it is difficult even to imagine what the Western media outlets would have made of it or how they would have portrayed Russia. But even now, when the resolution has been adopted, our Western partners act as if everything in it pertains solely to Damascus and Russia, and that its successful implementation depends almost entirely on the will of our two countries, while they, the self-styled champions of humanity, somehow imagine that they have an exclusive right to lecture us on the subject. In various media outlets, especially American ones, there have been false allegations that we mock the tragedy of this war and the situation in eastern Ghouta, and that we say that the campaign is exaggerated and fake.

I will ask these humanistic gentlemen once again: Where were they when American aircraft blew Raqqa off the face of the Earth? Where were the cries and the hand-wringing? Months have passed since the terrorists were banished from that city and yet it is still uninhabitable. On top of that, there are new reports of 24 civilian casualties from Coalition air strikes in Deir ez-Zor province. Who are they — second-class citizens? Or when innocent people die from democratic bombs, is that somehow immaterial — perhaps even honourable? We urge the United Nations — in fact, we insist — to send an assessment mission to Raqqa as soon as possible, and that the Coalition, which is in de facto control of the area, give it all necessary support. We also expect that instead of establishing quasi-

administrations in areas liberated from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Coalition leadership will come up with a plan to turn them over to the central authorities, in consideration of the Security Council's repeated affirmations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. That would be a great deal more constructive than the relentless quest to find what is a non-existent basis in international law for maintaining its presence on Syrian territory.

If Council members have interesting ideas on how to raise the profile of local Government and find effective ways to rebuild the ethnic and religious balance that existed before the war, they should present them to the Syrians in the negotiations in Geneva and let them decide the issues for themselves through the mediation of the United Nations. We also demand that the Coalition open humanitarian access to the territory it is occupying around the Al-Tanf military base in order to bring aid to the residents of the Rukban camp as soon as possible. By the way, that is also a provision of resolution 2401 (2018).

It is not for nothing that we keep saying that what is going on is painfully reminiscent of the situation in eastern Aleppo when the West unleashed a wave of monstrous anti-Russian hysteria. We are the only country being asked to implement resolution 2401 (2018). We are being criticized for instituting humanitarian pauses. Some claim that there are not enough of them. Demands, demands, demands. For some reason, someone is always bossily demanding something of Russia. Britain's Foreign Secretary has altogether decided that he is the prosecutor who is threatening to punish our country. Apparently, he called for today's meeting to be convened. He said so himself.

The Russian Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic is making daily and hourly efforts to achieve a cessation of hostilities, establish humanitarian pauses and ease the suffering of civilians. May I ask what other members have done to implement resolution 2401 (2018)? Has even one of their countries lifted a finger? Have they brought their influence to bear on those whom they consider the moderate opposition? Have they persuaded them to lay down their weapons and stop taking hostages?

The hugely complex issue that the Syrian conflict represents is being used for unscrupulous purposes. The rivers of tears roll down only when the next stronghold where militias and terrorists mingle is threatened, at which point an unheard-of level of action kicks in. The real aim is the regime, as some members like to refer to the lawful Syrian authorities. Any hint of its success in fighting terrorism on its own territory is a thorn in their side. They are ready to use any means to stop it.

This is a warning. We know about the chemical evidence being fabricated in order to blame Damascus. We know about the meetings on the subject, where they are being held and who is taking part in them. Today we once again heard unsubstantiated allegations about the Syrian Government's use of chemical weapons. I am tired of asking if members understand the futility of Damascus using chemical weapons from both a military and a political point of view, and the completely believable probability of militias using chemical provocations. I think they do understand it perfectly, but they persist in seeking an excuse for military intervention. United States officials, and the head of the Foreign Office and others, have already talked about military strikes against Syria, and it is obvious where that intellectual activity is heading. We urge everyone to stop the dirty tricks and join the concerted efforts to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria by implementing the resolution we have just adopted. We hope that the United Nations generally and Mr. Lowcock personally, as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, will rise to the occasion.

We have circulated a draft presidential statement on the resolution's implementation. We have placed it under the silence procedure until 1 p.m., and we call on the Council to adopt it. We hope that there will be no objections before one o'clock. I will take the liberty of reading it out.

(*spoke in English*)

The Security Council, with reference to its resolution 2401 (2018), urges all parties to implement it and, to this end, further urges all armed groups and all Member States with influence on them to ensure the safety of the announced humanitarian corridors for evacuation from eastern Ghouta. The Security Council calls for the establishment of similar humanitarian corridors in Al-Tanf and Rukban. The Security Council requests the Secretary-General to expeditiously send a mission to Raqqa to assess humanitarian needs there.

(*spoke in Russian*)

And by the way, we, like the other members of the Security Council, believe that there can only be a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We are doing everything we can to achieve that, and certainly somewhat more than those who have been spreading fire and fury today. We propose, as we have always proposed, that they join in these efforts, rather than throw up road blocks in an attempt to serve their own geopolitical agendas.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

First of all, the delegation of Kuwait aligns itself to the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of our two countries as co-penholders on the issue of Syria. We thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for their briefings. Four days after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), which demands that all parties cease hostilities throughout Syrian territory for 30 days, I would like to make the following points.

We have said from the outset that resolution 2401 (2018) is only the first step towards improving the humanitarian situation in Syria. However, to date we have not seen the implementation of the provisions of the resolution — not even a partial implementation — as we heard from Mr. Lowcock this morning, in particular in eastern Ghouta. The Council demonstrated unity in adopting the resolution and it is up to us now to ensure that all its provisions are implemented in full and immediately in order to alleviate the suffering of our brethren in Syria and to protect civilians. The resolution is binding on all, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Secondly, we welcome the fact that the United Nations is ready to come to eastern Ghouta and other besieged areas so as to deliver all kinds of aid and assistance to those that need them. We call on all the parties to the conflict in Syria to uphold international humanitarian law and abide by the provisions of the resolution, which cover all the various aspects that are causing the daily suffering of the Syrian people.

Thirdly, we underscore the importance of members of the Council making their contribution by spurring all the parties to the conflict in Syria to immediately implement the provisions of resolution 2401 (2018), keeping in mind that, as co-penholders, we are committed to closely follow its implementation, including ensuring a briefing by the Secretariat 15 days after the adoption of the resolution.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In accordance with to rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Government has examined the forty-eighth monthly report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and, yesterday morning, as usual, we sent a formal letter to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council setting forth the position of the Syrian Government on the report.

We are realistic. We know well that the United Nations is not a charitable organization. That is clear given that it has been unable to implement the principles of the Charter and international law since its inception — and the Palestinian question is a case in point. There have been other failures by the United Nations: in Iraq, Libya, the former Yugoslavia, Grenada — for those who have forgotten Grenada — Nicaragua, and the list goes on. However, I hope we can preserve the United Nations as an organization even as it continues to lack charitability. I would now like to make the following points.

First, the Syrian Government is fully committed to the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, as well as Syrian law and the Syrian Constitution, all of which stipulate that the Syrian Government has the responsibility to ensure the safety and security of Syrian citizens and protect them from terrorist groups.

Secondly, the current report, just like previous reports, has a great flaw, namely, that the authors of the report continue to rely on politicized sources, open sources and unreliable figures. At the same time, the report continues to ignore credible Government sources and even the reports issued by the representatives of the United Nations in Syria. Those representatives, along with the reports they have submitted to the United Nations in New York, acknowledge the efforts

of the Syrian Government and its cooperation on the humanitarian issue. However, none of this information that reaches New York appears to be mentioned in the report, as if by miracle.

Thirdly, the Syrian Government condemns the authors of the report — the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — especially after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018), for their failure to mention the Turkish aggression against the Syrian city of Afrin. That aggression has claimed the lives of many people, including women and children, destroyed public and private facilities and has led to the displacement of the city's inhabitants and a severe shortage of humanitarian goods. However, Afrin is not eastern Ghouta, eastern Aleppo, Fo'ah or Kefreya.

Fourthly, the Syrian Government fully rejects the failure of the authors of the report to mention the catastrophic impact of the so-called International Coalition and its members. The Coalition, which has claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians and members of the Syrian forces who are fighting Da'esh, committed two new massacres yesterday that claimed the lives of 29 civilians and injured dozens, most of them women and children, in the villages of Sha'fa and Thuhret Allouni in eastern Deir ez-Zor. It appears that the International Coalition is focused on this part of eastern Deir ez-Zor because it is home to civilians who do not host Da'esh or Al-Nusra Front terrorists. The Coalition has also destroyed the city of Raqqa, as my colleague the representative of the Russian Federation just noted. My Government calls once again for dismantling this illegitimate aggressive Coalition and for an immediately stop to its crimes against the Syrian people.

The Russian military issued a communiqué today saying that the areas under the control of the allies and agents of the United States in Syria are witnessing the worst humanitarian crisis currently in the country. Those areas have become black holes, just like the black holes in outer space.

With regard to the situation in eastern Ghouta, the Syrian Government believes that the current deterioration in the situation is due to the fact that terrorist groups there have launched attacks against residential zones and military targets. Up until yesterday, they had launched more than 2,180 missiles and mortars against the city of Damascus. Those attacks claimed the lives of 66 civilians and injured 474 others.

Government forces have been forced to respond to those attacks and to carry out their constitutional responsibility in guaranteeing security and safety for the citizens. My Government condemns the use, by the authors of the report, of the term "besieged areas" when considering the situation in eastern Ghouta, in rural Damascus. Under pressure from influential countries in and outside of the Council, they continue to deliberately ignore the fact that people in eastern Ghouta are besieged from within by the various armed terrorist organizations operating there. Those terrorist organizations are exploiting civilians and using them as human shields. They are seizing and monopolizing humanitarian assistance, distributing the aid to their supporters or selling it at exorbitant prices, as was the case in eastern Aleppo.

Syria regrets the failure of the authors of the report to refer to the suffering of thousands of kidnapped people who are in eastern Ghouta prisons and other places where the terrorist groups are spread. The kidnapped people include women, children and elderly. These people were kidnapped from their homes and places of work and have been subjected to the worst forms of torture. There are civilians, including from city of Adra and from Latakia, who were kidnapped from their homes five years ago. The Syrian Government also condemns the statements by the Secretariat and reports of the Secretary-General, which continue up till now to disregard the suffering of 8 million civilians in the capital Damascus as a result of hundreds of missiles and mortars launched daily from terrorist groups within eastern Ghouta.

The accusations by the authors of the report, like those of the Western countries that have influence on them, that the Syrian Government is allegedly besieging Ghouta have been consistently refuted. They have proven to be unfounded, as we have seen in recent reports noting that the Saudi regime provided "aid" to eastern Ghouta in February. That proves, first, that eastern Ghouta is not besieged and, secondly, that it is possible to access it. In particular, the terrorist groups in Ghouta continue to receive arms and munitions from Governments that support terrorism, including Saudi Arabia's so-called humanitarian assistance.

The Syrian Government is more committed than anyone to protecting its citizens across Syria. In that

regard, it has taken all necessary measures to protect its citizens and to respond to the attacks of terrorist groups in eastern Ghouta. We have sought to protect these civilians from the terrorists by establishing a humanitarian corridor to ensure their exit from eastern Ghouta. We announced the humanitarian corridor only hours after the adoption of resolution 2401 (2018) in order to ensure the safety of civilians — in cooperation with our Russian friends and allies. We have provided them with shelter, food, medicine and medical care at the expense of the Syrian Government, not the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Syrian Government has also called on members of the armed groups to lay down their weapons, cease their terrorist activities inside residential areas and engage in national reconciliation efforts. However, those terrorist groups, including the Al-Nusra Front, Jaysh al-Islam and Faylak ar-Rahman, have forcibly prevented civilians from reaching the corridor, as some members of the Council may know. They also sought to target the humanitarian corridor after it was announced, through the use of mortars.

As for the letter sent by the terrorist Mohamed Alloush, it is a clear indication that he rejects the exit of civilians from Ghouta. It is clear that he wants to use them as human shields. There seems to be a new trend in the United Nations to circulate a letter from a terrorist group as an official document. That is an innovation at the United Nations. There is no respect for the Member States concerned.

We have followed closely the way resolution 2401 (2018) was adopted and today's statements and briefings. We can clearly say that the main goal behind the adoption of the resolution is neither to reach a clear truce or ceasefire, as some may claim, nor to protect civilians and meet their needs. The main goal was to use the Security Council once again as a means to prevent any progress by the Syrian army and its allies in the fight against the terrorist groups that are targeting the city of Damascus. I say that for the thousandth time. How else to explain the fact that the resolution fails to refer to any Council resolution on counter-terrorism? Who can explain to us the strong resistance of some States during the negotiations on the draft resolution to any text that excludes Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and the terrorist groups affiliated with them from the supposed ceasefire? For three days, the Council has continued to negotiate the issue of whether to include or exclude them.

The false humanitarian propaganda on the situation in eastern Ghouta coincided with another campaign under the supervision of the United States, claiming the use of chemical weapons again in Syria, in areas under the exclusive control of terrorists or, I should say, the White Helmets. Today, *The New York Times* published a Tin-Tin style, childish report claiming that there is cooperation on the chemical issue between my country and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The article is a full-page report on the front page of *The New York Times*. It seeks to tarnish the image of the Syrian Government and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It ends by saying that this information is not substantiated.

> "Though experts who viewed the report said the evidence it cited did not prove definitively that there was current, continuing collaboration between North Korea and Syria on chemical weapons."

That is a word-for-word quote from *The New York Times*.

It seems that *The New York Times* is not up to date on what is going on in the world. It seems that the New York Times does not know that the American vessel, the *MV Cape Ray*, destroyed the chemical arsenal voluntarily submitted by the Syrian Government after joining the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as a full member. That is old information, déjà vu, as is said in French. However, it seems that *The New York Times* has decided to address this issue today.

I will read a communiqué that we received just now of information that I think should be taken into consideration when addressing the issue of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. And I can tell the Council that terrorists will use chemical weapons in Syria. On the morning of 20 February, four days ago, three Turkish trucks carrying chlorine entered Idlib governorate through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. I think that *The New York Times* should verify that information. Two trucks stopped in the village of Qalb Loze in Idlib, and the third continued its way to Al-Habit village in northern Idlib. Information available to the Syrian Government points to the fact that terrorists are currently preparing for a chemical weapon using the substance of chlorine on a large scale and to then accuse the Syrian Arab Army of using such weapons. Those terrorists have clear instructions from Western and Turkish intelligence to fabricate a chemical attack before 13 March, because

it is on that date that the eighty-seventh session of the Executive Council of the OPCW will be held.

According to the information I received just now, the two trucks are currently in the school of Qalb Loze village. Other cars and terrorists are also currently in the school, which they have turned into a warehouse for chemical weapons. As for the third truck, it is currently in a centre belonging to the Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, which is a Turkish agent, in the north-eastern part of Al-Habit village. A vast number of terrorists are currently unloading the truck there. In providing the Security Council with this information, we affirm that these terrorists, at the instructions of their operators, will use these chemical weapons before 13 March.

The main responsibility for ending hostilities lies with those countries that have real influence with terrorist groups in Ghouta and other parts of Syria. They should compel these terrorist groups to stop their terrorist activities and allow civilians to leave those areas, which are used by these groups as a base to launch their terrorist attacks.

There is in this Organization a group of five countries that are shedding tears over the humanitarian situation in Syria. Unfortunately, some of them are members of the Council. They have invited Member States to watch a movie about the White Helmets, two days from now in the Economic and Social Council Chamber here at the United Nations. Some members of the Council are advocating for a group that has been designated as a terrorist group by the Council. I hope that the Council will address the information I have provided seriously and appropriately.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of February, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Kuwait to the members of the Security Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staff and to the secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us.

Indeed, February has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of all the delegations and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all the relevant conference service officers, interpreters, translators and security staff.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of the Netherlands good luck in the month of March.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.8196

Security Council

Distr.: General
6 March 2018

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 8196th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 6 March 2018, at 10 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 6 March 2018, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 8196th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"The President invited Ms. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Ms. Keita.

"Members of the Council, Ms. Keita and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

18-03482 (E) 070318

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United Nations S/PV.8197

Security Council

Distr.: General
6 March 2018

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 8197th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 6 March 2018, at 3 p.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 6 March 2018, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 8197th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

"The President invited Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Mr. Lacroix.

"Members of the Council, Mr. Lacroix and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

18-03504 (E) 070318

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United Nations S/PV.8198

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8198th meeting
Wednesday, 7 March 2018, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Zambrana Torrelio
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Almunayekh
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Orrenius Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement (S/2018/128)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/174)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-06260 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Mansour Alotaibi, Permanent Representative of Kuwait, for his service as President of the Council for the month of February. We were impressed by the great quality of his work. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Alotaibi and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement (S/2018/128)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/174)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/128, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement, and document S/2018/174, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, members and non-members of the Council alike, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to outline the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As members know, this is my first briefing to the Council since I assumed my functions as Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

I should like at the outset to underscore the outstanding progress made in recent weeks in the preparations for the presidential and legislative elections, including the end of the voter registration process across the country, the enactment of the revised electoral law and the adoption of the electoral budget. I note that at this stage, more than 46 million potential voters, 47 per cent of whom are women, have registered, thereby indicating their intention to participate in the elections on 23 December.

Despite the many challenges they face, these millions of Congolese men and women have signified their commitment to ensuring the first peaceful transfer of power in the history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I wish to pay tribute today to the determination of the Congolese people to participate in the political process and to shape the future of their country, because it is that determination and commitment that will help achieve the goals set by the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement. On the eve of the commemoration of International Women's Day, I wish to pay special tribute to all Congolese women for their courage and determination to bring about peace, stability and the consolidation of the democratic process in their country. They have played a critical role in ensuring a peaceful process, and I am sure that they will continue to do so.

However, despite the progress made in the electoral process, major challenges remain. In this respect, it is important to restore the faith of the signatories of the

New Year Agreement, both in the political process as a whole and in the organization of the elections. As such, the effective implementation of conciliatory measures and the respect of electoral deadlines are essential. Regarding the implementation of the conciliatory measures, although the Government has released numerous political prisoners since the signing of the 31 December Agreement, many others are still being detained. In that regard, more effort must be made to examine the remaining typical cases and those involving other prisoners, and to pursue political openness.

The disproportionate use of force by the security services during the peaceful demonstrations of 31 December and 21 January is another major concern. This disproportionate use resulted in 16 deaths, more than 100 wounded and 100 arrests. During the 25 February protests, at least 2 more people were killed, 47 were tried and 102 arrested by security forces across the country. Ensuring respect for the freedoms and fundamental rights enshrined in the Congolese Constitution is also crucial. I call on the Government to conduct credible investigations into these incidents and to take appropriate sanctions.

With regard to the electoral process, several key issues on the agenda of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) have yet to be resolved. First, the electoral legislation must be finalized, in particular with the adoption by Parliament of the provisions on the distribution of seats. Secondly, the financial resources needed to organize the elections on time must be regularly disbursed and allocated to CENI by the authorities. Moreover, the Democratic Republic of the Congo electoral support project must be adopted. Finally, differences with respect to some of the election modalities, including the possible use of voting machines, should be ironed out.

(*spoke in English*)

While national political attention remains centred on confidence-building measures and progress in the electoral process, the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has continued to deteriorate. That brings increased risk for renewed instability in many parts of the country, and poses a serious threat to the civilian population, particularly in the East. The activities of the Allied Democratic Forces in the Beni area, and of Mayi-Mayi groups in North and South Kivu continue to pose significant threats to the civilian population, and those groups can still carry out attacks against the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO.) In the Kasai region, the security situation remains fragile, with reports of increased destabilizing activities of Kamuina Nsapu and other militia groups.

The rapidly deteriorating situation in Ituri province, centred around events in Djugu territory, is of grave concern. The outbreak of violence starting early this year, which has led to the deaths of more than 60 civilians and the displacement of more than 200,000 people, poses a significant risk of escalation and requires our full attention. The attack on Maze less than a week ago, which left at least 33 people dead, most of them women and children, was a callous act.

I condemn the persistent attacks by the various armed groups and militia across the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the recruitment of children, the rape of women and young girls, the burning of houses and schools, and the desecration of places of worship. It is the responsibility of those who direct and those who perpetrate such attacks to ensure that this unacceptable violence comes to an end. And it is our collective responsibility to ensure that those who direct and perpetrate such crimes be held fully responsible for their actions.

In the context of the political tension and the deteriorating security situation, the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face one of the world's most serious humanitarian crises. The number of internally displaced persons in need of humanitarian assistance has reached 4.5 million, the highest number in Africa. Hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. More than 7.7 million people face severe food insecurity throughout the country. More than 2 million children are severely malnourished and require urgent assistance. Relief efforts are hampered by critically low funding. There is no other way of saying it — the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is shocking.

I would encourage the Council in its deliberations on the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate to maintain its focus on how the political and electoral processes can best be supported, in line with the 31 December Agreement, the electoral calendar and the Congolese Constitution; and on how the security situation can be

stabilized and protection for the Congolese civilian population can best be assured.

A failure to generate confidence in the full and faithful implementation of the 31 December Agreement will serve only to heighten political tensions and to fuel the risks of inciting violence for political ends, particularly within a context of renewed and increased armed group activities. It is essential that all stakeholders find ways to ensure that the elections scheduled for the end of this year are peaceful and credible, and thus serve as a factor that contributes to the stability and security of the country and of the region as a whole.

During these times of heightened tensions, MONUSCO remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting the Congolese authorities and protecting the most vulnerable and most affected by acts of violence — Congolese women and men, girls and boys, who hold the aspirations of their country firmly in their grasp.

We must also not forget those who have lost their lives in the name of peace. That includes Congolese from all walks of life, such as the 27 staff members of the Independent National Electoral Commission who lost their lives during the voter registration process — three were beheaded — while working to ensure that elections can take place on time. That also includes those who have come to serve in the name of peace, such as the 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers who recently laid down their lives at the Semuliki bridge, and the Pakistani peacekeeper who fell in South Kivu. Our thoughts are also with our missing Tanzanian peacekeeper, whom we are sparing no effort to find.

If we are to truly honour the memories of all those who have paid the ultimate price for peace, then we must complete the task at hand and ensure that elections that contribute to the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are held, and that the spirit that led to the signing of the 31 December Agreement prevail. That is a task to which MONUSCO remains firmly committed, and I look forward to the continued support of the Council in that regard.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by acknowledging the presence of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu. I thank him for being with us here today. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her very enlightening briefing, which underscores succinctly the critical historical moment at which the Democratic Republic of the Congo finds itself. The electoral cycle, which is beginning, will indeed be crucial for the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as a whole. The challenge is enormous, while the situation is fragile. The serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the recent increase in intercommunal violence and conflict must move the Council to act.

The current instability is largely the result of delays and uncertainties related to the electoral process, which means that the holding of credible and transparent elections on schedule, while at the same time facilitating a peaceful and democratic transition of power, is crucial to the return to stability in the country. That is our shared priority. Accordingly, France stands ready to support the electoral process so that elections can take place in optimal circumstances and in close consultation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo's international partners, in particular the African Union and other countries of the region whose role is essential. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has a crucial role to play in that context. I would like to highlight three key factors that will contribute to the smooth holding of elections before returning to MONUSCO's role.

The first key factor concerns the trust of the entire Congolese people in the sound preparation of the technical aspects of the holding of elections and that the electoral timetable will be respected. Many uncertainties remain with regard to the holding of elections, including, for example, finalizing electoral lists after checking for duplications, while adhering to the prescribed deadlines; the registration process and timetable for Congolese citizens living abroad; the potential use of voting machines and ensuring that the process is transparent through appropriate measures; and the circumstances deemed appropriate for distributing electoral literature throughout the country. All those issues must be open to discussion by all stakeholders, including political parties, potential candidates and civil society.

The Independent National Electoral Commission has a crucial role to play in that regard, and we encourage it to work in a spirit acrof transparency and openness so as to build consensus on the technical aspects of the holding of elections. In that regard, we support the effective establishment of a team of international experts to support the electoral process, which the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the European Union, the United Nations and the International Organization of La Francophonie have agreed to dispatch. Trust, based primarily on transparency in the holding of elections, will therefore be the first key factor leading to success.

The second key factor concerns the electoral environment and the return to a spirit of consensus within the framework of the full implementation of the 31 December Political Agreement. If the outcome of the elections is to be accepted by everyone, it is essential that they be held in an open and peaceful environment in which every candidate can announce his or her candidature and campaign freely without fear of reprisal. In that regard, I call once again for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including, above all, the right to demonstrate, as well as the need for the proportional use of force in the context of law enforcement. It is crucial that the violations observed during the most recent demonstrations not be allowed to reoccur and that those responsible for them be brought to justice. I also take this opportunity to recall the need to fully implement the Agreement of 31 December 2016, particularly with regard to measures aimed at defusing the political situation, such as the release of political prisoners and ending the prosecution of members of the opposition so as to allow them to campaign unhindered. Those measures are needed to provide the conditions for the holding of credible and peaceful elections.

In that context — and this is my third and last point — MONUSCO has a key role to play in supporting the electoral process, contributing to the smooth holding of elections in a free, open and peaceful environment, and protecting civilians. Last year, the Council conferred upon MONUSCO an appropriate mandate to pursue those two strategic goals. For its part, the Mission, through its strategic review, has made the necessary adjustments to better respond to current issues, be more flexible and responsive and better protect civilians. This year, we believe that MONUSCO's priorities must be reaffirmed and maintained. Through its good offices and its technical and logistical support, MONUSCO must help ensure that the right conditions be set in motion for the sound holding of elections. By acting with resolve, completing ongoing reforms and adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates all its components, the Mission must be able to protect civilians in the country more effectively.

The Security Council must lend its full support to MONUSCO in realizing those two strategic priorities. The Council must also provide MONUSCO with the means needed to accomplish those tasks, including by maintaining its troop ceiling and supporting it through solid cooperation with the region so as to ensure the full implementation of the 31 December Agreement and enable all Congolese citizens to trust once more in the process.

In our opinion, those are the conditions needed for the success of the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with the established timetable. Council members may rest assured of France's absolute commitment to achieving that goal.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Let me express our appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui for her maiden briefing on the current situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the activities of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We take this opportunity to extend our congratulations to her on her appointment and wish her all the best in the discharge of her heavy responsibilities at this very critical juncture in the political developments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also welcome His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is indeed a matter of serious concern. The continued instability in the country has displaced many and caused a major humanitarian crisis that requires attention. We look forward to the discussion on this particular issue to be held next week. We welcome progress made in preparations for the holding of elections, including the completion of voter registration across 26 provinces, including the troubled Kasai region.

Initiatives such as the release of the former Chief of Staff of the opposition leader Moïse Katumbi and the granting of amnesty to several individuals sentenced for various offenses are steps in the right direction, but more needs to be done in terms of confidence-building measures, which we believe is vital to creating the atmosphere needed for the successful holding of elections this year.

It is absolutely necessary that all Congolese parties exercise maximum restraint, refrain from making inflammatory statements and defuse the political tensions prevailing in the country. They should also fully commit to implementing the 31 December Political Agreement, which remains the only viable framework for resolving the current political impasse in the country. It is also incumbent upon all Congolese parties to provide all necessary support and cooperation for the timely and peaceful conduct of the elections.

The support of the international community will be vital to ensuring the successful holding of the elections. In that regard, enhancing the coordination of the United Nations, the African Union (AU), the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international partners is necessary to facilitate coherent and effective support for the electoral process, which is critical to the peace and security of not only the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also the wider Great Lakes region. In that regard, we welcome the various discussions held recently by regional leaders with President Kabila. The idea of a possible joint visit by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat that has been mentioned is also very welcome.

The implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains very important. We appreciate the outcome of the meeting held in Addis Ababa last month, which brought together representatives of the signatories and the guarantors to review the status of the implementation. In the light of the regional dynamics and the continuing multifaceted challenges, the need to redouble efforts towards the full implementation of the framework agreement cannot be overemphasized.

The role of MONUSCO continues to be very important in supporting the implementation of the 31 December 2016 agreement and the electoral process and in protecting civilians, in line with its mandate as set out in resolution 2348 (2017). We therefore support the extension of the mandate of MONUSCO for another year based on the recommendations of the Secretary-General.

We appreciate the protection through projection concept that MONUSCO is implementing by introducing the review of the locations of the operational bases and rapidly deployable battalions to ensure better protection of the civilian population. The engagement of MONUSCO and the strengthening of local community protection mechanisms in areas affected by the closure of forward bases are also a creative initiative to better mitigate conflicts and violence. We also take note of the measures undertaken by the Mission to enhance the security of its bases and peacekeepers following the tragic Semuliki incident, as well as to review its footprint, in order to adopt a more agile and robust posture in its operations on remote and difficult terrain.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the Mission needs to be sufficiently resourced and equipped. That is also reinforced by the findings of the special investigation into the Semuliki incident. Finally, we are ready to discuss those and other issues in the upcoming negotiation on the draft resolution.

Mr. Zambrana Torrelio (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we welcome the presence of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu. We also appreciate the briefing by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We wish her success in her post.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/174) notes that the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains tense, particularly with regard to the elections and confidence-building measures. In that regard, Bolivia reiterates that, in order to ease such tensions, the parties must implement the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement for the effective holding of peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections that lead to a peaceful transfer of power and ease political tensions.

We urge the signatories to the Agreement to implement it, including the confidence-building measures contained therein. That is why we support the initiatives and the good offices of the Special

Representative in that regard. However, we reiterate and call on the parties not to overlook the principles of preventive diplomacy and good offices aimed at a negotiated political solution. In that connection, we welcome the progress made towards the implementation of the electoral calendar made by the Independent National Electoral Commission and the conclusion by that body of the registration of 46 million potential voters, of whom 47 per cent are women.

We commend the work of the regional organizations, such as the Southern African Development Community and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, for their support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the holding of presidential and legislative elections on 23 December. In that context, we welcome the meeting held on 14 February, which was attended by the Presidents of the Republic of the Congo, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and at which a communiqué was issued calling for the implementation of the Nairobi declarations of 12 December 2013 and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

We would like to emphasize the joint work of the Head of MONUSCO and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region on the preparation of the elections. We highlight their work on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as the repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of the members of the various insurgent groups, both Congolese and foreign, operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We encourage the Mission to continue to expand the community violence reduction programme and to promote peaceful coexistence among communities, in coordination with the Government and armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with its mandate.

We believe that the implementation of such measures would be better complemented by the deployment of the Intervention Brigade, which is essential both to supporting the electoral process and to protecting civilians, so that, in coordination with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the political and security challenges facing the country can be overcome. The most recent report paints a sombre picture of the security situation and gives a comprehensive account of the continuing violence, which includes disputes over natural resources, conflicts between armed groups and intercommunal and ethnic violence. That is why it is estimated that this year, more than 13 million people will need protection and humanitarian assistance. That is an increase of 50 per cent as compared to 2017.

MONUSCO has been present in the country for 20 years. In the light of the renewal of its mandate, we believe that it is imperative to re-evaluate its priorities. We believe that it is important to reflect on the current needs of the Congolese, whether there is a joint strategy with the Government or if the root causes of the conflict, such as the illegal exploitation of natural resources, have really been addressed. It is important to support the decisions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the context of respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity in order to achieve long-term peace and stability.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): Let me begin by welcoming the presence today of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Okitundu. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui for updating the Security Council on the intensifying instability and dire humanitarian consequences in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the proliferation of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly in North and South Kivu, Tanganyika, Ituri and Kasai, and the significant increase in human rights abuses, with 744 violations in January, 60 per cent of which were perpetrated by State agents. As is too often the case, and as the civilian population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo knows all too well, the result of that instability has been devastating. Some 4.5 million Congolese have now fled their homes and communities. There are more internally displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than anywhere else in Africa. This year alone, 40,000 people have fled from Ituri to Uganda, bringing the refugee population to 670,000 people. That has caused a devastating humanitarian crisis. More than 13.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. That number has doubled since 2017.

There is clearly a link between the ongoing political uncertainty and the increasing insecurity. The Congolese people cannot express their legitimate concerns with the political situation without risking their lives. On 21 January and 25 February, security

forces once again violently repressed demonstrations, leaving at least nine people dead, dozens wounded and hundreds arrested. This must stop.

The holding of credible and constitutional elections by 23 December this year leading to a democratic and peaceful transition of power is essential to ending the political crisis. Without this, there is a significant risk of further violence destabilizing not just the Democratic Republic of the Congo but the wider region also. We welcome the progress made towards elections so far, including the completion of voter registration, the passing of election laws and the announcement of an electoral budget. However, this is no time for complacency. There is much more to do. It is essential that the election calendar be honoured and that key dates set out in the electoral timetable are met, including the completion of the voter register list by 5 April, the audit of the electoral list by 25 May, convocation of the electoral process in June and the registration of presidential candidates in July.

But holding credible elections is about more than complying with timelines. It is also about creating the conditions that enable free and fair elections to take place. In order to do this, we call on the Government to implement the 31 December agreement in full, including the full implementation of the confidence-building measures set out in the agreement. The Government must also respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, opening political space and allowing peaceful demonstrations and freedom of expression.

The United Kingdom is extremely concerned at the high number of violations of political rights and fundamental freedoms in January, and we were appalled by the disproportionate use of force against churchgoers and peaceful protesters on 31 December 2017 and 21 January and 25 February 2018, and the subsequent loss of life.

We recognize that the onus is not only on the Government to deliver credible elections, and in this context we call on the opposition to engage constructively in the process on the basis of the 31 December agreement, which will demonstrate their credibility and potential to govern.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has a crucial role to play in this crucial year in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement. We welcome the efforts to improve MONUSCO's ability to carry out these tasks more efficiently and more effectively. In particular, we welcome efforts to enhance the flexibility and mobility of MONUSCO's forces and to improve their performance. It is important that these reforms be implemented swiftly.

In conclusion, let me be clear. The violence and resulting dire humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are the result of the continual disappointment of the people in the political process and the political leaders responsible for this process. The only way to avert further violence is for free and fair elections to take place in December and for the 31 December agreement to be fully implemented. Further excuses and delays will only lead to more violence and despair. The Security Council cannot allow this to happen. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot afford to wait any longer.

Mr. Orrenius Skau (Sweden): Let me begin by also welcoming Leila Zerrougui to our meeting in her new role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We look forward to working with her, and she can count on our strong support. Let me also express my appreciation for the presence of Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Okitundu and thank him very much for being with us today.

Since we last met in this Chamber to discuss MONUSCO and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, yet another peacekeeper has died in that country. I would like to express my condolences to his family and to his country, Pakistan. Deliberate attacks on those working for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere are completely unacceptable. The worsening security situation is also taking a tragic toll on the Congolese population. It includes new ethnic and intra-communal conflicts, continued attacks against civilians and renewed sexual violence and brings with it an acute humanitarian crisis. Human rights abuses and violations are also increasing, especially in the context of the electoral process. In this regard, violence by State security forces against peaceful protesters is of particular concern.

An important step on the path to lasting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would clearly be the holding of credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections on 23 December, with the ensuing democratic transfer of power as per the Constitution and the 31 December agreement. This is something that requires the support of all, including regional actors, with which coordination continues to be essential. We welcome the progress made on technical electoral preparations, including, as noted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the voter rolls, the budget and the electoral laws, but credible elections also depend on the overall electoral environment. For the elections to be credible, it is vital that human rights be respected, promoted and protected. Confidence-building measures, as per the 31 December agreement, including to ensure women's full and effective participation, are also essential. We encourage steps to increase the number of women candidates, in accordance with the Constitution as well as the electoral law.

The year 2018 is indeed crucial for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and MONUSCO has a crucial role to play. The focus of the Mission must continue to be on protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the 31 December agreement, including the elections. In so doing, it needs to be effective. To protect civilians, the further strengthening of early-warning mechanisms and, most importantly, early proactive action is needed, including through conflict resolution and good offices. This is in addition to improvements in its military response, which should include enhanced so-called enablers and allow for the Force Intervention Brigade to regain its capability. The Mission's support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to conduct a credible electoral process and enable the holding of free and fair elections is also critical. In supporting this, we would encourage renewed efforts on the part of the Mission in its technical assistance and its good offices. Support for an opening of the political space, confidence-building measures as per the New Year's agreement, women's political participation and efforts to build trust among the stakeholders will be an important form of support by the Mission for the holding of free and fair elections. In all of this, the Mission, of course, needs to be adequately resourced.

Soon a year will have passed since our — the Council's — experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp were brutally killed while investigating violations of Security Council sanctions in the Kasai region. Sweden appreciates the Secretary-General's commitment to establishing the truth. The perpetrators must be brought to justice. Meanwhile, the ability of the Group of Experts to safely carry out the mandate that has been given to it by the Council must be supported by MONUSCO.

In the long run, the recurrent violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be resolved only by addressing its root causes, including not only further democratization, human rights, good governance and the rule of law, but also economic development and poverty alleviation. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region outlines measures in this regard and must be implemented. There must also be an integrated plan for an overall whole-of-United Nations approach in support of sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is the responsibility of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — but with the assistance of the whole of the United Nations, the region and other parts of the international community, including financial institutions — to enhance efforts towards sustainable and lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we would like to welcome the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, and to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Peru is especially concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the eastern part of the country, and the presence of armed groups in the Kasai region. We are concerned about the vulnerability of civilians and the increase in displaced persons and refugees. We are compelled to condemn the ongoing human rights violations, including numerous cases of sexual violence. We are also compelled to condemn the attacks suffered by peacekeepers, and offer our condolences and solidarity over the deaths of Tanzanian and Pakistani peacekeepers.

We are concerned about the Mission's security failures and vulnerabilities, which have been revealed

by the special investigation team led by Mr. Dimitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for the Rule of Law and Security Institutions. We believe it important to follow his recommendations to strengthen staff security.

We reject acts of intimidation against MONUSCO personnel attributed to the security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The latter must cooperate with the Mission in its functions of monitoring and protecting civilians, mandated by the Council. That includes civilian access to detention centres, hospitals and other public spaces.

We stress the importance of successfully holding the postponed presidential, legislative and provincial elections. We believe that MONUSCO should continue to provide the logistical support required to that end. However, the Government has the responsibility to lead the process and guarantee free and fair elections. In that regard, we welcome the Government's announcement that President is not eligible for re-election under the country's Constitution. That should promote a better climate for the due development of the electoral process, which should inspire confidence and mass participation of citizens and political groups in the country.

To that end, we must protect and promote human rights, including the rights of expression and association. We consider it important to promote in particular the participation of women and young people in the process. It is also necessary to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the numerous and systematic violations that have been recorded.

We must also address the alarming humanitarian situation of thousands of citizens. Particularly worrisome is the ongoing flow of refugees to neighbouring countries that we have seen since the beginning of the year, and the new outbreak of cholera caused by limited access to potable water, which requires an urgent response from the international community.

Given the situation and the problems observed, we conclude by expressing our support for MONUSCO, which we believe remains crucial for the protection of civilians, the defence of human rights, stability, the fight against impunity and the building of sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Ms. French (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Zerrougui. We are very pleased to welcome her to the Council and to have her head the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We also welcome the participation of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. She Okitundu, in today's meeting.

Before I start, I want to take a moment to remember Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán who were kidnapped on 12 March 2017, nearly one year ago. We remember Michael and Zaida and their dedication to improving the lives of the Congolese. We continue to work to ensure those responsible for their murders will be brought to justice.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country at a critical juncture today. For the first time in history, the people of Democratic Republic of the Congo are on the verge of a peaceful democratic transition of power. They have waited too long for this moment, but their enthusiasm is clear. Despite violence, threats and broken promises, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have eagerly lined up to register to vote. They not only have a great desire to determine their future, but they also have an undeniable right to do so.

For nearly 20 years, the international community has invested in MONUSCO to protect the Congolese people from violence and to bring them closer to an enduring, inclusive peace. That Mission is the most expensive in United Nations and history and the most complex. It is fair to ask ourselves what we have gotten in return for this investment. Although the progress has been uneven, the greatest achievement of MONUSCO's precursor mission is clear. The July 2006 voting that resulted in Joseph Kabila's election as President marked the first free elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in over 40 years. It is one of the most complex elections the United Nations has ever helped organize — a true achievement.

Today, the challenge is related, but different. The need to protect the security and rights of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, however, is the same. Free, fair, inclusive and credible elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power are the next indispensable step in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's development. Like elections elsewhere, the promised elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will represent much more than the fulfilment of the minimum right of participation in a democracy. They will be sign of progress across the board for the

Congolese people. They will be a critical concession on the part of the Government that it does not exist to extract wealth and power for an unaccountable elite.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like all Governments, exists to respond to the needs of its citizens, but before that can happen there is much more progress to make. President Kabila has already stayed in office long past his constitutional term limit. His commitment to elections in December that results in his transfer power to a successor remains unacceptably vague. In addition, political prisoners who were guaranteed release under the December 2016 Political Agreement remain unjust unjustly detained. The Government continues to pursue questionable charges against political opponents, and peaceful protesters have been met with violence as the Government cuts off communication and denies their right of peaceful assembly.

However, they are also signs of hope amid the violence and uncertainty. So far, the Government is satisfying the technical requirements for holding elections in December and, most importantly, the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are energized and ready to vote. Building on this energy and delivering on the promise of democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is now the central task of the Security Council. As we consider the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, we must ensure that it is doing all it can to ensure that elections are held on 23 December, as the Government has promised.

Our highest priority for the Mission will always be to protect Congolese civilians from violence. Troop and staff performance is bedrock. Accountability is essential. Sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. However, our focus on the performance of MONUSCO cannot be allowed to crowd out our focus on its purpose. We are not the devoting this much time and resources to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to reinforce a stagnant status quo. Our objective must always be to move forward to help the people achieve the future they deserve.

We call on the Council to rise to that challenge as we renew MONUSCO's mandate. The Mission must step up to the task of ensuring that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is ready for elections. We must hold the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo accountable for adhering to clearly defined benchmarks as we progress towards elections. We must ensure that Congolese in all areas of the country are able to vote. We must ensure that the ability of citizens and candidates to participate safely and securely in the electoral process is respected. We must ensure the integrity of their vote by using proven and appropriate voting mechanisms.

Finally, and perhaps most important, we must know when those things are not being done. MONUSCO must report to the Council in a timely and transparent manner when progress towards elections is not being made and when peacekeepers fail to do their jobs. It is for that reason that we support a trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure continued Security Council focus on elections.

When Ambassador Haley met with President Kabila last year, they talked about the historic opportunity he has to be the first leader of his country to voluntarily yield power to a democratically elected successor. That would be a remarkable and enduring legacy, and there is no more important work the Council can do but to share in that legacy. We invested a great deal in the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Now is the time to ensure that the investment pays off, not just for the Council but for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time you are presiding over a meeting in the Chamber, Mr. President, allow me to sincerely congratulate you. Equatorial Guinea remains firmly committed to cooperating with you as you conduct your challenging work.

I welcome Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu. His continued attendance at Security Council briefings concerning his country demonstrates his Government's commitment to taking part in the Council's debates on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Equatorial Guinea also thanks Ms. Leila Zerrougui for her efforts at the helm of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We congratulate and thank her for briefing to the Council on the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/174) so soon after her appointment. It has helped to us to better understand the current situation in the country.

Equatorial Guinea continues to closely follow, as it must, the developments in the sisterly country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I reiterate my country's commitment to peace there. Stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is essential to the political process. Equatorial Guinea welcomes the initiatives adopted to improve the political environment and approve the electoral calendar on 5 November 2017 and other measures to ensure the successful holding of elections on 23 December. We urge the Congolese Government, the Independent National Electoral Commission, national and international partners and all political actors to take all the measures necessary to guarantee a clean, fair and transparent process that respects the current Constitution and the comprehensive and inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016. Equatorial Guinea believes that the international community and all main actors involved in the conflict should provide all of the required logistical support to the Independent National Electoral Commission to ensure that elections are held as scheduled, with every possible guarantee.

It is essential to highlight the fact that, in order to resolve the problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the international community must fully respect the Government's leadership and authority. The solutions developed by the international community will be more effective if they are complemented by Government action. In that regard, as Ms. Zerrougui just highlighted in her briefing, the commitment of the Government to take measures to ensure the holding elections in December must be acknowledged.

The security and humanitarian situation continues to be of concern. Clashes persist in the east of the country, thereby preventing the normalization of the situation and, by extension, causing a humanitarian crisis that, according to United Nations reports, has reached alarming levels. The illegal exploitation of natural resources on the part of militias and other armed groups still active in the area must end immediately. We reiterate our call upon all parties to refrain from perpetrating acts that could worsen the already dire situation. The international community must redouble its efforts to provide an urgent response to the humanitarian needs of the country.

Equatorial Guinea believes that a political solution achieved through frank, direct and inclusive dialogue among Congolese is the only way to achieve peace in the largest country in Central and Southern Africa. All groups active in the country must participate in the political dialogue with a positive attitude.

Finally, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea reiterates its full support for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for its tremendous humanitarian efforts and willingness to promote peace, security and stability in that country. Similarly, Equatorial Guinea congratulates and thanks regional organizations, such as the African Union, the European Union, the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, for their efforts to bring about peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire would like to congratulate your country, Mr. President, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to assure you of its full support throughout your term of office.

Côte d'Ivoire emphatically condemns the terrorist attacks on the headquarters Burkina Faso's armed forces and on the Embassy of France in Ouagadougou. We express our solidarity with France and Burkina Faso at this difficult time.

I welcome today's presence in the Chamber of Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Côte d'Ivoire also congratulates Ms. Zerrougui, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and thanks her for her briefing on the situation in the country.

On the situation in that brotherly country, I would like to make two main points, namely, with regard to the adoption of the Political Agreement on 31 December 2016 and the security and humanitarian situation.

With regard to the adoption of the Political Agreement, the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the progress made by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), in particular on the publication of the electoral calendar and the finalization of electoral lists ahead of democratic, credible and inclusive elections. We urge the Congolese political

class to continue their efforts to create an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful elections.

Côte d'Ivoire acknowledges and welcomes the commitment of the Congolese Government to organizing elections within the time frame set. We call on the opposition to commit resolutely to the political and electoral process under way and to play a constructive role in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement.

Despite the progress made in the implementation of the electoral calendar, my delegation remains concerned about the delay in the effective implementation of the Political Agreement. We call on the Government to create the necessary political and social conditions for the enjoyment of individual and collective fundamental freedoms. Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the technical and logistical support of the United Nations for the electoral process under way and encourages greater synergy among the efforts by CENI, MONUSCO and the Congolese Government with a view to ensuring the effective holding of the elections on 23 December.

With regard to the security situation, Côte d'Ivoire is concerned about the ongoing activities of armed groups in several provinces of the country, particularly in North and South Kivu. Despite the efforts of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, those armed groups remain active in the provinces of Tanganyika, Haut-Katanga and North and South Kivu. My delegation is also deeply concerned about the persistence of activities that have led to a mass exodus of people, such as serious human rights violations and deadly attacks against the United Nations forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Côte d'Ivoire welcomes MONUSCO's commitment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a particularly difficult sociopolitical and security environment. In order for MONUSCO to carry out its mandate — the renewal of which we support — we encourage it to continue its collaboration with the Congolese authorities. We hope that an adjustment of its current configuration, as part of its new protection-through-projection strategy, will allow for a better assessment of its strategic priorities in the areas of protecting civilians and supporting the electoral process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The humanitarian situation also remains a matter of great concern, with nearly 13.1 million people in need of protection and humanitarian assistance across the country, including 4.5 million internally displaced persons, and 670,000 refugees in neighbouring countries.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire would like to call on regional organizations and the international community — namely, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Economic Community of Central African States, the African Union, the United Nations and the Security Council — to provide all the necessary assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a view to the holding of elections on 23 December.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, allow me to welcome the presence among us of His Excellency Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am also very pleased to welcome Ms. Leila Zerrougui and to congratulate her for her appointmenet. She has our full support. I am sure that her mission will be very successful. Allow me to share our thoughts about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are worried about the divisions among political and civil society actors in the country. The lack of commitment and goodwill on the part of all the political actors might undermine the holding of free, fair and credible elections. We call upon all the political actors to engage in the ongoing political process.

We note that President Kabila committed in January to ensuring that elections would be held as planned and that the Constitution would be respected. However, it is critical that the Government take concrete steps to speed up the implementation of confidence-building measures, to release political prisoners, to allow the return of political exiles to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to lift the ban on public demonstrations and to bring to justice alleged perpetrators of human rights violations. Only by doing so will the Congolese Government show genuine will to normalize the situation in the country. We are concerned about the restrictions on the political space. The Congolese authorities should protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution and stop the harassment of political and civil society actors. We also expect that the security forces will bear accountability for abuses and the use of excessive force against peaceful demonstrations.

The full implementation of the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement remains the only way out of the current political situation. All political actors must realize that there is no alternative to the election. A lack of commitment to the process by the opposition would be a great loss for Congolese society during the transition period. Close cooperation with civil society, particularly with women representatives, including their involvement in the electoral process, is also crucial, as it constitutes a foundation for widely accepted elections.

We welcome the announcement of the Independent National Electoral Commission on the conclusion of the voter registration process. It is now necessary to ensure the further timely implementation of the electoral calendar, the establishment of the legal framework and the provision of required funding. Those actions could help reassure foreign donors of the credibility of the process and encourage them in providing financial, logistical and technical support for the election.

We are concerned about the dramatic deterioration in the humanitarian and security situation and the significant increase in violence, especially in the Tanganyika and Ituri provinces, which has generated significant population displacements. The political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has strategic importance for the stability of Central and sub-Saharan Africa. A peaceful and growing Democratic Republic of the Congo could give a huge boost to the whole continent. We also think that a Security Council visit to the region could bring about positive results. The coming months will be critical in preserving all of the efforts made by international, regional and national actors in order to stabilize the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In conclusion, Poland commends the hard work, courage and sacrifice of the members of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We once again offer it our full support.

Mr. Almunayekh (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words about Kuwait. Given your professionalism and that of your staff, we are certain that the Kingdom of the Netherlands will preside over the Security Council in an outstanding manner during the month of March.

I would like to begin by thanking Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), for her informative first briefing since assuming the helm of MONUSCO. We wish her every success in her duties, which she will undoubtedly carry out very ably. We also welcome Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Where the political process is concerned, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is undergoing a critical period with regard to the issues of adhering to its electoral calendar and holding presidential elections by the end of the year. We welcome the Government's efforts in that area and stress the importance of ensuring that the presidential elections are held according to the established timetable and without delay. They should be free, fair and democratic and should include all political parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The presence of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration here today indicates how important the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo considers the political process, which it should continue to focus on until political and security stability is achieved and the elections are held on schedule. That is the best way to ensure that the Congolese people can enjoy the decent life that they have waited for so long and that they deserve.

We support the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for another year, as it is providing the Government with important and vital support in preparing for the next political stage. It is the largest Mission of its kind within the United Nations and is operating under many major challenges. We firmly condemn the attacks on it by armed groups and stress that those responsible should be held accountable and brought to justice.

We deplore the dreadful humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The 13 million people currently in urgent need of humanitarian aid are double last year's numbers, as the Secretary-General says in his report (S/2018/174). The economic situation is also seriously worrying, and the blatant incidents of human rights violations are undoubtedly linked to the deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country. However, we are confident that the implementation of the comprehensive Political

Agreement, the confidence-building measures and the holding of presidential elections as scheduled will help to improve the economic, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also underscore the importance of regional and international organizations — particularly the European Union, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the International Organization of la Francophonie — in support of political stability in the country, which is crucial to making progress in the political process. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework agreement embodies the hopes of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region as it helps to achieve stability, address the root causes of the conflict and promote confidence among neighbouring countries.

Lastly, we look forward to seeing the results of the investigation into the killing of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán. A year after their deaths, we still do not know who was responsible. We hope that the investigation will be completed and the perpetrators held accountable as soon as possible. We also call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to pursue those responsible for the incident in December 2017 that resulted in the deaths of one Pakistani and 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers and the disappearance of another Tanzanian peacekeeper, as well as the incident that resulted in the deaths of 27 Congolese. We continue to be particularly concerned about the loss of life in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in her new role, and are grateful for her comprehensive briefing. We hope that as the new Head of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) she will be able to establish a constructive dialogue with the country's authorities and enable the Mission to function more effectively. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the Council.

We hope that ensuring that the presidential elections scheduled for 23 December are held on time will help to reduce the tensions in society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We believe that for their part, the opposition forces should cooperate more actively with the Independent National Election Commission, recognize the proposed election dates and refrain from any violence. However, MONUSCO's role in organizing and conducting the elections should not go beyond providing the national authorities with technical and logistical assistance. In our view, the Mission's main job is to improve the security situation. In that connection, we would like to draw attention to the recent increase in the activity of illegal armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which have been conducting systematic attacks on civilians, Government security forces and peacekeepers. Changes in that negative trend should be used as a chief indicator of the country's stability.

We were alarmed to learn that after years of calm, clashes between the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups in Ituri province in the country's north-east have broken out again. We have taken note of MONUSCO's decision to establish temporary bases in the area, strengthen patrols and continue consultations with the parties. The series of rebel attacks on peacekeepers at the end of last year and the overall security situation the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has led us to question the conclusions and proposals in the report on the Mission's strategic review. Before extending the Mission's mandate, we would like to see more attention paid to the following points.

The situation with the illegal armed groups operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is difficult and they are a very long way from being fully neutralized. The Mission's mandated task of protecting civilians from the armed groups running rampant in the east continues to be strategically important, and we think it would be ill-advised to divert its attention from dealing with that to other issues. We are puzzled by the Secretariat's rationale for its proposal to end the Mission's stabilization efforts and reduce its cooperation with Kinshasa in supporting camps for former combatants. It will be impossible to find a long-term solution to the problem of armed groups without restoring the Government entities in the east and settling the repatriation issue for former combatants. Besides that, the proposal for redeploying units of the Force Intervention Brigade is also unclear. According to the Secretariat, they should be evenly distributed among the four sectors of responsibility throughout the country. The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2018/174) mentions the Brigade only once. And

yet in yesterday's meeting with troop-contributing countries (see S/PV.8196), we were surprised to learn of the lack of joint operations with Kinshasa against the illegal armed groups.

It is regrettable that some of the proposals of the strategic review are already being implemented without the authorization of the Security Council. In that regard, we would like to mention the concept of protecting civilians through the projection of force. We do not rule out the fact that its implementation could lead to complications in communication within the Mission and therefore, unfortunately, to a recurrence of the December incident in Semuliki. Achieving tangible results from new concepts takes time, as was the case with the so-called rapid deployment battalions. We recall that they became operational only three years after that concept was approved.

Finally, we draw attention to the need to adopt additional measures to ensure the security of peacekeepers. Like many of our colleagues, we are not satisfied with the information provided in the report of the Secretary-General regarding the pace of the investigations into the Semuliki incident.

With regard to the mandate, it is necessary to discuss an entire range of difficult issues. For us, it is already clear that last year's reconfiguration of the Mission's strategic tasks neither improved its effectiveness nor helped the situation in the country.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): We congratulate Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui on her assumption of her post and we thank her for her substantive briefing. We welcome the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, to the Chamber.

We are deeply concerned about the increasing tensions and the rift between the ruling majority and the opposition forces with regard to implementing the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement. Confidence-building measures will therefore be essential throughout the electoral process to ensure free and credible elections. We also note the considerable divergence within the opposition, which impedes the political negotiations. The closing of the political space for opponents and other stakeholders is causing greater unrest.

In the light of the current situation, the role of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is critical to creating an environment conducive to fair elections. The international team of electoral experts, working together with the dedicated senior United Nations adviser, should quickly be operationalized. It is therefore necessary to support MONUSCO in providing technical and logistical assistance for the electoral process. Parliament should also promptly adopt the electoral law and the legislation on the distribution of seats.

We remain concerned about the deteriorating security situation across the country. Despite the efforts of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) to combat foreign and Congolese armed groups, the latter continue with their attacks and to destabilize the situation, which is further aggravated by intercommunity violence. At the same time, FARDC military operations against the armed groups are displacing hundreds of thousands of the local population. It is also clear that the unstable situation in the neighbouring countries of the Central African Republic and South Sudan has had a negative impact on the northern territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That has resulted in large refugee flows, further escalating the humanitarian crisis, which must be addressed with greater funding and support by the international community. The Government must also facilitate unhindered humanitarian access and protect the human rights of the vulnerable populations, in particular women and children.

Perhaps most alarming are the attacks on peacekeepers, which have taken a tragic toll in human lives. MONUSCO, together with troop-contributing countries, should be assisted in enhancing its position and in training its personnel for more offensive strategies and responses appropriate to asymmetric conflicts. That must be accompanied by a greater engagement with regional political leaders and stakeholders to tackle the threat posed by armed groups. We further encourage the measures taken by the Mission to adapt to the current security situation in the country by implementing the protection-by-projection strategy, reorganizing its military component, streamlining civilian tasks and setting up early warning and response mechanisms.

We would also like to express our deep concern about the lack progress in the investigation of the murder of two members of the Group of Experts, Zaida

Catalán and Michael Sharp. We need to further support and encourage senior officials and technical experts to pursue the exhaustive investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing and welcome the presence Mr. Okitundu, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains difficult. In particular, the security situation in the central and eastern parts is still serious. That is mainly owing to the foreign armed groups. China would like to highlight the following points.

First, advancing the political process is an important path towards resolving the tensions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The international community should respect the leading role and ownership of the Congolese Government and people in the political process and provide the necessary funding and resources to advance the political process. The international community should continue to support African regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as the main channels for good offices. They should also strengthen coordination, form partnerships and foster cooperation.

Secondly, security and stability represent an importance basis for advancing the political process and national reconstruction. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has the primary responsibility for protecting the civilians. It is important to assist the Democratic Republic of the Congo in enhancing its capacity to guarantee its own security and achieve peace and stability through a process led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has played an important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China supports the recommendations of the Secretary-General to continue to extend the MONUSCO mandate. We hope that the Secretariat and MONUSCO will continue to strengthen communication and coordination with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, listen carefully to its views and improve the rapid response capability and operational effectiveness of MONUSCO so as to better respond to the difficult situation on the ground.

Yesterday, at the meeting of the countries contributing troops to MONUSCO (see S/PV.8196), many representatives spoke of the difficulties in equipping and training personnel, which merit the attention of the international community. We hope that the international community will provide the necessary support.

Thirdly, it is important to continue to scale up humanitarian and economic assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to help the country to advance the national reconstruction process and to resolve the root causes of the conflict.

The Chinese Government has consistently supported the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, provided assistance to its national reconstruction efforts to the extent possible, and contributed peacekeepers to MONUSCO. China stands ready to join the international community in continuing to play a constructive role in achieving peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The year 2018 is a crucial year for the Democratic Republic of Congo. As the Security Council prepares to renew the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), I would like to make three points: first, on the political process; secondly, on the role of MONUSCO in the elections; and thirdly, on the protection of civilians.

My first point, on the political process, the people of Democratic Republic of the Congo look forward to the country's first peaceful transfer of power through free, fair and credible elections at the end of this year. Progress towards that historic day continues, while progress in the implementation of the 31 December Political Agreement has stalled. Fundamental freedoms are threatened.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands condemns the violence used during the protests held on 25 February. All harassment of civil society, journalists and human rights defenders must end. We call on all parties to recommit to the spirit of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement

in order for the upcoming elections to gain the trust of the Congolese people.

My second point concerns the role of MONUSCO this year leading up to the elections. MONUSCO has a vital role to play in that context, not only in providing logistical support but also in supporting the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement, building trust among all actors and monitoring progress towards the elections. Therefore, our univocal support for MONUSCO, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General to effectuate good offices is indispensable. The Council must therefore show the will to monitor progress and equip MONUSCO in that regard.

My third point is on the protection of civilians, which must remain a priority for MONUSCO. We are very concerned about the upsurge in violence in Ituri over the last weeks. Sadly, it is not the only area where we see increased fighting and civilian casualties. MONUSCO is adapting to the circumstances through the "protection through projection" approach. It is the shared responsibility of the Council, the Secretariat, the troop-contributing countries as well as of the Congolese authorities to ensure that the conditions are met to make this a success. We have to keep that in mind during the mandate-renewal discussions.

Let me conclude by reiterating our sincere gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her and her team's relentless efforts. Together, we must work towards a better future for the Congolese people.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to encourage speakers under rule 37 to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. She Okitundu (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to participate in this Security Council meeting on the situation in my country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I would like also to discharge my duty to congratulate the Kingdom of the Netherlands, your country, Mr. President, on its accession to the presidency of the Council for this month of March and to convey to you our deep appreciation for the manner in which you are presiding over our debates. I would once again like to express to the Council the gratitude of the Congolese people and its Government for the efforts that the United Nations continues to deploy in the quest for solutions to bring about a lasting peace in my country.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, and to express our appreciation to him for his commitment to defending and promoting the purposes and principles of the Charter and the cause of my country.

I must also thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of MONUSCO, for his presentation of the report of the Secretary-General on MONUSCO (S/2018/174). Although I rightly appreciate the content of the report, nonetheless I would briefly like to state my Government's views on a number of the issues addressed therein.

The political aspect, as the Council is aware, remains dominated by the electoral process. Following the completion on 31 January of voter registration, the Independent National Electoral Commission will undertake in coming months, in keeping with the electoral calendar, to identifying and registering Congolese abroad. In the meantime, in order to strengthen confidence, dispel doubts and maintain contact with the various stakeholders in the process of ensuring that credible and transparent elections are held, the Commission has undertaken an awareness-raising and educational campaign on technical and operational questions relating to the elections, in particular relating to voting machines, with parties and political groups in the opposition, the majority and civil society. Since 1 February it has undertaken to clean up the electoral register, which will enable the Parliament to adopt a law on the distribution of seats during its current session. This stage will be the last institutional requirement for the holding of elections, in line with the electoral calendar.

As I underscored on 12 February during a meeting on the electoral process in my country, in order to ensure that the elections are well organized and to create a climate conducive to their success, the Government is working to fulfil the tasks that have been conferred on

it. In that context, the Government and MONUSCO, in the quest for a solution to the thorny issue of political de-escalation, met on 25 and 31 January to address, inter alia, issues relating to political demonstrations, the media and the release of so-called political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. The conclusions of the meeting came out in the form of a report that is to be signed by the stakeholders.

Furthermore, the Government is concerned at the improper use of the concept of political de-escalation in a charged context dominated by opposition-led insurrectional politics aimed at upending the established legal order, in violation of the Constitution and the Agreement of 31 December 2016 to hold a peaceful, credible and transparent elections. Political de-escalation should not be considered as a unilateral requirement that the Government alone should uphold. Inflammatory rhetoric seeking to undermine the institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, calls for insurrection and popular revolt by using places of worship and unjust targeted sanctions that violate the norms of international law do not contribute to the goal of easing the pre-electoral climate. De-escalation must concern all stakeholders: those of the majority, the opposition and civil society, including the Catholic Church, as well as international partners, which must act in the desired way, namely, to constructively and peacefully support the political process leading to elections.

On human rights, as I already told the Council, the situation regarding fundamental freedoms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not part of a deliberate policy to violate human rights. When such violations occur, they are solely the acts of the individuals involved and must not go unpunished.

Regarding the events of 31 December 2017 and 21 January 2018, the Government on 1 February 2018 set up a joint commission of inquiry with representatives of the Government, the National Human Rights Commission, non-governmental organizations that champion human rights, the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Commission's mission is to consider the issue of loss of life and other related issues. The Commission is also charged with investigating the events of 25 February. Following the investigations, its conclusions will be communicated to the Ministry of Justice, which will transmit them to the judiciary.

Nonetheless, concerning the specific events of 25 February, it should be underscored that the two presumed suspects in the murders of two compatriots, in Mbandaka and Kinshasa, have been arrested.

On the justice system, it is important to recall that the trial on the murder of the two United Nations experts has been under way since 5 June 2017 at the military tribunal of Kananga, Kasai Central, which is holding its twenty-eighth public hearing. Twelve suspects are appearing and 13 others have fled and are being actively sought; they are being tried in absentia. Tshidima Constantin Bida Bula, accused of ordering the murders, was arrested at the end of December and is currently being questioned by the prosecutor general, who will then make him available to the competent court. Contrary to what some people are saying, it is precisely in order to cooperate fully with the Democratic Republic of the Congo follow-up mechanism — negotiated between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with the appointment of a special prosecutor — that the trial has slowed down, because we are awaiting new evidence, to be provided by the investigating team of the special prosecutor.

Indeed, the prosecutor considered that he had collected enough evidence to go to court, and it was under these conditions that the hearings I spoke of took place. They were moving towards an indictment by the public prosecutor and arguments for the defence when the military tribunal was asked to suspend the hearings while it awaited, as I noted, new evidence from international experts. Nonetheless, since it arrived in Kananga, in Kasai Central province, the Robert Petit team has been working in close cooperation with the high-level military investigation. The investigators returned to Kananga on 20 February, after having gone home for the New Year's holidays.

As for the four Congolese who accompanied the two experts, an investigation is under way at the military court in Kananga. It is also being conducted jointly with the monitoring mechanism of the Special Prosecutor of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

On the security front, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are continuing their operations to rid North and South Kivu provinces of negative forces and reassert State authority in the Kasai area to restore peace and security.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which recently stepped up their attacks against the FARDC, peacekeepers and civilians, is a source of great concern that deserves the attention of the entire international community. For our part, on 13 January, the FARDC launched a vast military offensive, which unfortunately is being carried out without MONUSCO, to neutralize that negative force. The notable results of that operation included the death of ADF senior commander Muhamad Kayira, on 27 February during an operation to seize the Mapobo Valley. He was on a list of 26 Rwandan, Ugandan and Tanzanian nationals wanted by Congolese courts for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the region. As we have often pointed out, the ADF is using asymmetrical methods in their attacks. Special training and appropriate equipment are required to combat it.

As to the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), although they are weakend, the FARDC continues to carry out the operations it started as part of its Operation Sukola II in order to completely eradicate it. As part of those efforts, my country calls once again for the involvement of the Security Council and the international community, in accordance with the recommendation of the eighth high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which was held in Brazzaville on 21 October 2017, for the unconditional repatriation to their country of origin, no later than 20 October, of disarmed FDLR ex-combatants and their dependents who are still in transit camps in Kisangani, in Tshopo province, and Kanyabayonga and Walungu, in North and South Kivu provinces. That unconditional repatriation also concerns ex-combatants of the former Mouvement du 23 Mars. In the same vein, all foreign fighters in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including combatants from the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Sudanese People's Liberation Army in Opposition, were asked to return to their countries.

With regard to the humanitarian aspect, while recognizing the prevailing situation in the conflict-affected parts of our country, on which the Government's attention is focused, we believe that there is a great disparity between the statistics presented by some foreign partners and those provided by the Congolese public services in charge of humanitarian issues. In that regard, my Government believes that there is a need to strengthen collaboration and partnership in our humanitarian work in order to clarify the number of people, Congolese and others, in need of assistance. It should be noted that, in order to deal with the situation, the Government has established the National Fund for Humanitarian Solidarity. It goes without saying that any external support in this area is always welcome.

Thanks to the systematic work in the fight against impunity carried out by the judiciary in general, and by the military judiciary in particular, my country has made enormous progress in the fight against sexual violence, which is recognized by the Secretary-General in his letter of 27 April 2017 and in his various reports. Taking into account that situation, the Secretary-General has shown willingness to remove the FARDC and the Congolese National Police from the list of country security forces listed for rape. My country therefore continues to wait for that willingness to materialize and for the FARDC and the Congolese National Police to be effectively delisted.

With regard to the case of sexual violence referred to in paragraph 30 of the report under review (S/2018/174), my Government regrets that the information provided by MONUSCO did not respect the requirements of the national strategy to combat sexual violence, which calls for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Congolese Ministry of Gender to be the only institutions charged with producing data on cases of gender-based violence in general, and sexual violence in particular. In order to avoid contradictions in the statistics published by various United Nations bodies, United Nations agencies and MONUSCO must interact and communicate with UNFPA prior to publishing any reported case that falls under the category set out in the joint communiqué signed on 30 March 2013 between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations to combat conflict-related sexual violence.

In March 2017, my Government asked that the renewal of the mandate of MONUSCO take into account the expectations of the Congolese people, whose most ardent wish is to see the negative forces and various armed groups that are attacking the eastern part of the country totally eradicated. To that end, it is crucial to strengthen the operational effectiveness of United Nations forces, primarily those of the Force Intervention Brigade, the only offensive force that can counter those armed groups. In view of the situation on the ground, that wish remains in effect.

Considering that situation, my Government calls for a qualitative resizing of the MONUSCO force with fewer, but more specialized, troops who are able to track down armed groups and capable of dealing with asymmetrical threats. For the Mission's new mandate, those troops must work in close collaboration with the FARDC, enjoy greater flexibility and mobility, and be equipped with appropriate equipment for greater efficiency. Priority should therefore be given to the Force Intervention Brigade, the spearhead of that MONUSCO-FARDC partnership. In that regard, MONUSCO units that are not essential to military operations against armed groups and that are present in areas where a MONUSCO force is not justified, and where the concentration of forces is greater than the level of the threat, must be withdrawn to reduce the number of troops and adapt the force to the tracking of armed troops.

Returning to the Force Intervention Brigade, which operates in a partnership, my Government regrets that it has not been consulted on important issues affecting peace in the region, such as the withdrawal of Tanzanian artillery and South African aviation unit, as well as its relocation from the command centre of the Rapid Intervention Brigade in the theatre of operations to a fixed base in Goma, which undermined its effectiveness. As we just mentioned, it is important to equip it with appropriate equipment to make it more effective.

With regard to disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation, I am sure the Council will agree with me that this programme is of great importance in terms of reintegrating ex-combatants to prevent them from being recruited again by armed groups. That programme should be one of the priorities in MONUSCO's new mandate.

Discussions on the partnership between the Democratic Republic of Congo and MONUSCO should continue in the context of dialogue and the strategic review, the objective of which is the reorganization of human, financial, logistical and other resources, in accordance with the new mandate that the Security Council will entrust to MONUSCO. In those exchanges between our country and the United Nations, the review should focus on practical arrangements and planning for the gradual and permanent withdrawal of MONUSCO troops. Indeed, MONUSCO's goal is not to remain ad infinitum in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We must therefore hash out together a negotiated withdrawal strategy within a reasonable time frame. For the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Force Intervention Brigade should be the last to leave the country, along with civil services and various offices supporting democracy building, which can continue to carry out their activities after the end of the tracking operations against the armed groups.

We will have succeeded together in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate no longer needs to be discussed, which is the wish of the Congolese people and of my Government. We hope that this will be the penultimate renewal and will definitively contribute to the return of peace for the people of the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The crucial mandate entrusted to MONUSCO cannot be successful without eradicating armed groups, whose activities constitute the main threat to civilians. The terms of reference of the new MONUSCO mandate must therefore absolutely include the imperative of eradicating armed groups among the priorities of the strategic partnership and under the leadership of the FARDC. In order to be effective, the partnership must have the appropriate resources to carry out unconventional warfare and combat the asymmetrical methods of armed groups.

In conclusion, I wish to express my Government's appreciation to Mr. Maman Sambo Sidikou, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the work he carried out during his term in office at the Head of MONUSCO to restore peace in my country. My Government sincerely thanks him. In the same vein, my Government welcomes the appointment of Ms. Leila Zerrougui as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Government assures her of the same support given to her predecessor to enable her to carry out her duties.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Afghanistan

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security (S/2018/165)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Pakistan and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Security Council, I welcome Her Excellency Ms. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan; Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council; and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Her Excellency Ms. Joanne Adamson, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2018/198, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the Netherlands.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/165, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, France, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

The President: The result of the voting is as follows. The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2405 (2018).

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, both members and non-members of the Council, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are further encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Yamamoto: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for scheduling this meeting on Afghanistan on International Women's Day. I wish to express my appreciation for Minister Kaag's initiative to lead an all-women delegation today and to encourage other members to do the same. I am also very pleased that the Afghan delegation is joined today by Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi. They are two women with distinguished careers in working for the advancement of peace in Afghanistan.

The members of the Council witnessed for themselves the importance of women's rights and women's empowerment during their recent visit to Kabul. I am sure that they were deeply impressed, as I am, by the resilience of Afghan women, whose strength holds the fabric of society together. I will touch on the women, peace and security agenda throughout my briefing.

A week ago, Afghanistan successfully hosted the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. All conference participants endorsed the call for direct talks between the Government and the Taliban without preconditions. All relevant parties, including the Taliban, agree that a negotiated political settlement is the way to bring an end to the conflict.

President Ashraf Ghani offered peace to the Taliban without preconditions and laid out a path for negotiations, with a series of concrete proposals, to

create a space for the opening of talks. The offer of negotiations is on the table. It is now incumbent upon the Taliban to come forward with an offer of their own and to start direct talks with the Government in order to put an end to the suffering of the Afghan people. The Taliban's argument that they will not talk to the Afghan Government because the conflict is not between Afghan parties misrepresents the reality that tens of thousands of Afghan people are killed and maimed every year in direct confrontations between the Taliban and the Government forces.

Making peace and reaching out to opponents requires resolve, courage and, above all, national unity. Looking at recent developments in domestic political, I am compelled to express my concern about some actions that could deepen divisions in society. Political leaders need to place the national interest above a partisan agenda. National unity provides the only basis for the continuation of international support to Afghanistan and for the implementation of effective reforms. Political stability also requires inclusivity. The prolonged political impasse over the governorship of Balkh should be resolved swiftly through a negotiated solution. It must not undermine the authority of the National Unity Government or hinder progress on the delivery of key Government functions. The upcoming elections provide a further opportunity to ensure that unity and stability prevail and that all groups are represented.

When the members of the Council visited Afghanistan in January, they delivered a clear and strong message that parliamentary elections must be held in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019. Since then, there has been accelerated progress on preparations for voter registration. The Independent Election Commission, under its new Chairperson, is working hard on electoral preparations, but the timelines remain tight. In one of his first statements, the Chairperson of the Commission acknowledged that elections would most probably have to be delayed beyond the current date of July 2018 but that they could still be held this year as long as preparations are not delayed and voter registration begins on schedule in April.

The Independent Election Commission must also concentrate on areas where it can deliver and seek the assistance of other agencies of the Government in areas that need to be accelerated, such as the recruitment of voter registration staff. The Afghanistan Central Civil Registration Authority must now do all it can to enable eligible Afghan citizens to register to vote by issuing citizen identity cards, known in Afghanistan as *tazkeras*, to the millions of people who do not possess them. Public outreach is important. Afghan voters will need to understand the importance for them to cast their votes, even though they may have serious concerns about the electoral system because of past experiences. The United Nations is working with the Commission to ensure women's participation in all stages of the elections — as candidates, campaigners and voters.

The new penal code, which entered into force on 14 February, reinforces Afghanistan's compliance with international human rights and criminal justice standards and is a milestone in the country's criminal justice reform. We wholeheartedly welcome its coming into force. UNAMA played a valuable role in drafting the code. I am pleased to report, on today's International Women's Day, that the Afghan Cabinet has adopted the necessary amendment to the penal code to ensure that all provisions of the Elimination of Violence against Women law continue to apply, giving Afghan women continuing legal protection from violence.

Women are also disproportionately affected by the conflict. More than 1,200 women were killed or injured last year, mostly from ground fighting and suicide attacks. I am particularly concerned by the increase in civilian casualties caused by the Islamic State in Khorasan Province, which has been expanding its geographical spread beyond the hitherto stronghold of eastern Afghanistan into northern Afghanistan. We are monitoring those developments very carefully in the light of potentially destabilizing effects in the north and beyond.

I would like to turn to another issue of pressing importance, which is the question of refugees and displaced persons. Pakistan and Iran have generously hosted Afghan refugees for decades in times of great needs, and we appreciate their contribution. It should not be forgotten that 1.5 million people returned to Afghanistan in 2016 and 2017. The Afghan Government has welcomed the return of its citizens, but such large numbers inevitably stress the Government's ability to provide services. Assurances that returnees would gain access to land, housing and basic services have unfortunately not been realized. We believe that gap must be addressed before encouraging more people to move back to their homeland voluntarily. It is possible, and even likely, that hundreds of thousands more

Afghans will return from Pakistan this year alone. While the international aid community is preparing contingency plans to provide short-term help, the responsibility for people's protection and welfare rests with the State. Simply put, only the State can provide land, guarantee property rights and ensure adequate provision of services.

With regard to investment and improving Afghanistan's economy, I am pleased to note the recent ground-breaking ceremony for the construction in Afghanistan of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline. The nearly 2,000-kilometre-long pipeline will be able to transfer 33 billion cubic metres of gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan. The ground-breaking was not only a success for regional cooperation and integration, but the beginning of the fulfilment of a long-standing project in Afghanistan that will contribute significantly to Afghanistan's economic self-reliance.

UNAMA appreciate's the Council's adoption of a renewed mandate for UNAMA. We have important tasks ahead of us this year, including peace efforts, the upcoming elections and the ministerial conference on Afghanistan, which the United Nations looks forward to hosting with the Government of Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. I must also mention the critical areas of human rights and reforms, including with regard to anti-corruption efforts. As we work with and for the people and the Government of Afghanistan, we look to the Security Council to provide us with a clear mandate.

The President: I thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Sarabi.

Ms. Sarabi: It is indeed an honour for me to be here today to represent Afghan women. I thank the delegation of the Netherlands for the opportunity to participate in this meeting.

I am very hopeful that the Security Council gained a very clear picture of the situation during its their last visit to Kabul. I thank the Council for coming to visit us. Surely, that will pave the way for new opportunities to reiterate the Council's support for the people of Afghanistan, especially women. Women's lives have changed remarkably in the past 17 years, and two factors are responsible for that change.

One of them is the tireless efforts and persistent struggles of women themselves; the other is the Afghanistan's Constitution, which includes important articles in favour of women that have enabled them to become engaged in political and social issues in the country. In addition to the Afghan Constitution, which provides equal rights for both Afghan men and women, on 5 March 2003, Afghanistan joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition, laws were adopted on eliminating violence against women and preventing sexual harassment.

Afghanistan today is well equipped with national policies and international commitments to support women's empowerment. Afghanistan's Constitution guarantees equal rights before the law for both women and men. Similarly, the Constitution guarantees women's access to education, health care and social inclusion. After 17 years, Afghanistan has in place key legislation, policies and national plans that further increase the Government's obligation to strengthen women's participation and equal rights.

Afghan women's inclusion in some of the key decision-making roles at the central and provincial levels is remarkable. Women's presence today in the Cabinet, the Parliament, the Senate, provincial councils, the High Peace Council, the security sector and civil society is also remarkable. The post of Deputy Attorney General for the prohibition of violence against women has been established, and there are currently 242 women prosecutors working in different departments, including that on the elimination of violence against women. There are also 300 female judges, who are working to ensure the rule of law and prevent violence against women. In addition, 800 out of 4,000 defence attorneys are female. In addition, family response units are actively working throughout all 34 provinces. With regard to the security sector, a total of 3,144 female police officers are working in the Ministry of the Interior, with a target to increase that number to 5,000. And 1,500 women are currently playing an active role in the Ministry of Defence.

The Government's initiatives have led to significant achievements in education and training, which translate into an increase in the number of girls attending school from 3.5 million in 2013 to 3.6 million in 2015 — 40 per cent of the total number of students attending school. Young girls continue to pursue higher education after graduating from school, either in the country or abroad.

The number of professors in governmental universities increased from 3,159 to 5,582 in three years, of whom 774 are female. It is worth mentioning that the National Unity Government has not limited women just to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and that the role of women in governance has expanded to all departments. For example, a 50 per cent presence of women in the Citizens Charter National Priority Programme is guaranteed.

In July 2015, the Government of Afghanistan launched its first national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). The plan involves collaboration with other Government agencies, civil society organizations and international organizations to implement resolution 1325 (2000). In Government leadership, there are 3 female Ministers and 11 female Deputy Ministers, but what is worth mentioning is the significant presence of women at the middle-management level.

Afghan women have made significant progress in small and medium-sized businesses. For example, the Chamber of Commerce for Women has been established to empower and support Afghan women in business. We are proud of the growth of the role of women in civil society. Although they are still young, their advocacy skills are commendable. An estimated 2,000 female employees are actively working in the media sector, where up to 50 print, video and audio media outlets are run by women.

Women's participation in sports is another tangible achievement. The number of Afghan girls in sports now exceeds 12,000, and in the past three years they have won 50 foreign medals. Sportswomen have been well represented in various sports, especially the Bamyan Mountain Peace Cup bicycle-racing championship.

Women are actively engaged in the peace process. Out of a total of 65 members of the High Peace Council, one in a leadership position, four in the executive and twelve in the General Assembly are women. Sixty-three women out of 320 are also members of the Provincial Peace Committee. Right now, women are represented at all levels of the High Peace Council. In the High Peace Council, the leadership and all members — including myself as a Deputy Chairperson — have always maintained and respected the idea that peace without women's meaningful participation is impossible. Therefore, we are committed to boosting women's role at all levels of the peacebuilding process, ensuring their participation in leadership and safeguarding their rights.

The High Peace Council and I also believe that social peace is paving the way for political peace. That is why we initiated the Women's Peace Network, which we call the "mothers of peace". The first phase is now complete and the second will start very soon, in late March. The Network will bring changes to the mindset of the people from one of violence to one of peace.

The High Peace Council has also created a women's advisory board, where rural women from 34 provinces, in addition to Provincial Peace Committee members, will meet on a quarterly basis and share their concerns and ideas for improving our operations. We are committed to increasing the number of female members in the Committee from two to three in each province.

At the second Kabul Process conference, the Afghan Government shared the road map for peace. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani offered talks with the Taliban without preconditions. He added:

> "The Taliban will be recognized as a political party in the structure of the Constitution and by the Afghan Government if they obey the rule of law and respect women's rights, which is one of the strategic priorities for Afghanistan's international partners."

Also, one of the subjects mentioned in the proposal is a provision for the rights and safety of all citizens of Afghanistan, especially women, in accordance with the Constitution.

These are achievements for Afghan women, but some challenges remain and I shall highlight just the principal ones. First, violence against women remains very high throughout Afghanistan. Secondly, there is a lack of awareness and rule of law for the implementation of gender equality. Thirdly, access to higher education is difficult, especially for girls who are married young and cannot pursue their education. Fourthly, election campaigning for women, especially in rural areas, is still a challenge.

I should like to make the following recommendations.

We must ensure that women's rights are non-negotiable at any level of the peace dialogue. We must make a commitment to including women's meaningful participation in all agendas at the negotiating table and in decision-making in peace and reconciliation processes. We must ensure that the

female members of the Provincial Peace Committee have the capacity to negotiate and lobby. We must also ensure specific and sufficient allocation of budgets and corresponding financing mechanisms for the effective implementation of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), and include women in initiatives related to improving livelihoods and community-based projects to strengthen development outcomes and address risks.

Afghan women expect their partners to stand by them, bring peace and security and uproot the pervasive phenomenon of terrorism, because if we are the primary victims today, surely tomorrow others will be next.

The President: I thank Ms. Sarabi for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Safi.

Ms. Safi: I thank you, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to address the Security Council today. I should like to thank the Netherlands, as the President of the Council this month, for inviting me to share my perspectives on the Afghan peace process.

Today, in my capacity as a peacebuilder and member of the research community in Afghanistan, I would like to touch on the current trends, conditions on the ground and key issues relating to the Afghan peace process. The perspectives I will be sharing with the Council today have been deeply informed by a decade of consultations I have led as part of our efforts at the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies with diverse sectors, community members and the brave and resilient women of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has witnessed great progress since 2001. This is reflected in the emergence of a bright and vibrant new generation of youth, the representation of women in all sectors of Afghan society and the strengthening of a promising democratic system of governance. Seventeen years ago, hope replaced despair as Afghans embarked on the path towards a peaceful and stable future where conflict would become a distant memory. We welcomed international investment and commitment to supporting that hope.

But as I speak here, I must tell Council members that this hope is fading. The theater of conflict is becoming more confusing, complicated and lethal. In 2001, we were fighting one group; we are now fighting over 20 regional and international terrorist organizations. Safe zones have now become battlefields that extend from rural to urban areas. The Taliban, its affiliated group the Haqqani Network, and fighters affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are now targeting civilians, including women and children.

In 2009, 285 women were killed as a result of the ongoing conflict. As mentioned earlier, that number rose to 1,224 in 2017. That is extremely alarming. Let us not forget last year's killing of 9-year-old Shukria, who, while travelling with her family from Ghazni province to Quetta, was stopped by insurgents, held captive and later beheaded. That incident prompted nationwide protests and made it very clear that Afghans would not tolerate impunity for those targeting civilians.

Despite the Taliban committing to a code of conduct on the protection of civilians, the group continues to carry out attacks in densely populated areas, showing no regard for civilian lives. I implore the Security Council and the international community to ensure that transitional justice is not compromised in the pursuit of peace and reconciliation. The peace deal with Hizb-i Islami, signed in September 2016, showed us that peace is possible in Afghanistan. However, it also showed how easily actors could sideline the need for community healing, exclude women and civil society engagement and take steps that reinforce a culture of impunity in the pursuit of achieving peace.

While security challenges remain the predominant source of concern, it is not the only cause of despair among Afghans. Our recent findings indicate that insecurity and political instability go hand in hand, and are the two primary drivers for Afghans fleeing. For the first time in Afghanistan's history, we are now witnessing young, single Afghan women making up a significant portion of those undertaking the dangerous journey out of the country.

As Ms. Sarabi just described, the second round of the Kabul Process culminated last week with the Afghan Government presenting a detailed offer of peace to the Taliban for the first time. While there has long been national consensus on the need for peace among Afghans, there still remain serious and diverging concerns on the best way forward for peace to unfold. Fundamental questions remain on whether the time is right for such negotiations. What are the red lines for negotiations? What would justice look like in an eventual settlement? How will the rights of women be upheld and protected? How will the participation of women at all levels be guaranteed in the implementation and monitoring of any agreement reached? What is the way forward after a peace agreement is reached,

and what will that peace mean to different sectors of Afghan society?

For women, it is imperative for the State to define the type of peace that would ensue from reconciliation. Our findings show that women believe that the future of their rights is intricately tied to the outcomes of the peace process. Habiba from Kunduz province told us that the gains of the past 17 years in women's empowerment, freedom of speech, human rights and civil values should not be open for negotiation. On the question of reintegrating ex-combatants, women, particularly those living in rural areas, expressed fear of an escalation of violence and further suppression of women. How those reintegrated would be monitored after a peace agreement is also a significant source of concern.

The Afghan Government's launch of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, in 2015 offered great possibilities for the promotion of women's involvement in all areas related to peace and security. However, its implementation continues to suffer setbacks, rendering women's voices as symbolic at decision-making levels. For example, while gender units have been created within most ministries in legal structures, they lack the necessary tools and budget required to carry out the mandate of resolution 1325 (2000). The time has come to expand women's roles from one of mere presence to active engagement, consultation and inclusion. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the Afghan Government and civil society organizations must work together towards identifying where the bottlenecks lie and adopt concrete and genuine measures to address those gaps. Only then can we create spaces where women, both formally and informally, are able to realize their agency.

There is also a great disconnect between the rhetoric of local ownership and how it is actually implemented. The selective nature with which the High Peace Council chooses the narratives it incorporates into its peace agenda, the civil society actors it decides to engage with and the priorities it chooses to focus on have led many to question its legitimacy, credibility and objectivity.

Real and meaningful progress notwithstanding, the Afghan Government remains weak, with financial, security and internal strife mounting. We must therefore be cognizant that any proposed changes to the Constitution as a result of a peace agreement must not erode the rights and freedoms of all Afghan citizens. I appeal to the Security Council to closely monitor any amendments to the Constitution, ensure that the sequencing of peace-making activities and overtures are supported with confidence-building measures from the Taliban and, lastly, facilitate greater engagement between the High Peace Council and diverse actors of Afghan society to ensure that all narratives are represented and supported through national consensus.

In conclusion, past experiences show us that supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is not enough to prevent and combat terrorism. When we asked women at the rural level what they saw as an obstacle to achieving peace in Afghanistan, almost all highlighted regional interference. The Security Council and the international community must persuade Pakistan to engage constructively in all efforts to curb the threat of terrorism and support an intra-Afghan dialogue for peace.

Afghanistan's international partners have repeatedly expressed their intention and will to stand behind the people of Afghanistan to bring about lasting peace, security and stability. Today, I urge those present to stand beside us, and not behind us.

The President: I thank Ms. Safi for her briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Saikal (Afghanistan): Let me begin by congratulating the Netherlands on assuming the presidency of the Security Council, and by thanking you, Madam President, for convening today's debate on Afghanistan, which coincides with International Women's Day. We pay tribute today to the important contributions of women in promoting stable and prosperous societies. It is an occasion to focus on what more needs to be done to empower women against the many challenges they face, particularly in conflict and post-conflict societies.

I am pleased that Her Excellency Ms. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, will be joining us later on, and my dear colleague, Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam Safi are among us here today. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Tadamichi Yamamoto, for his briefing.

Today's meeting provides another occasion to assess the overall situation in Afghanistan. I am pleased to report that, in the course of the past three months, the imperatives of Afghanistan's security, stability and development received added international attention, with particular focus on addressing the root causes of the conflict and strengthening our defensive and security capabilities, in parallel with efforts to devise a more practical peace plan.

Our security forces, with better support from international partners, have increased pressure on terrorist groups across the country. Nevertheless, regional sponsors of terrorism, having faced international pressure and setbacks in the countryside, remain belligerent, as reflected by their efforts to engineer violent attacks in urban centres with high numbers of civilian casualties. Despite that, governance reform and economic development have continued unabated. A national dialogue among various political forces has been under way on issues that are crucial to our unity and political stability, the success of our peace efforts and preparations for holding timely and transparent parliamentary elections this year.

Afghanistan has always emphasized that our partnership with the international community has been a strategic asset for advancing shared goals of defeating terrorism and achieving stability. In that light, the Council's visit to Kabul from 13 to 15 January and its high-level meeting on 19 January on the security and development of Afghanistan and Central Asia (see S/PV.8162) were clear signs of international support at the highest level. We are grateful to all members of the Council for their collective commitment and improved consensus on a more focused engagement on key issues related to Afghanistan's security, stability and development. We wish to offer a special debt of gratitude to my friend and colleague Ambassador Kairat Umarov for his personal efforts in that regard as President of the Council during the month of January.

During the Kabul visit, the Council discussed a range of security, political, economic and social issues with Afghanistan's leadership in Government, the Parliament, the judiciary, the High Peace Council, political parties and civil society. One common request pertained to effective Council action to address the sponsorship of terrorist outfits and the problem of their regional safe havens as priority needs for security and stability in Afghanistan. That was highlighted by Ms. Safi here today. It is also reflected in the recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2018/165).

Of late, we have seen new measures at the international level to change the calculus and promote genuine and productive counter-terrorism cooperation. In that regard, recent decisions, including the reduction of financial aid to the State concerned and its inclusion in the watch list of the Financial Action Task Force represent a renewed attempt to encourage genuine action on the crucially important goal of defeating terrorism effectively. We hope that the trend continues and that the response to those measures is positive, in the interest of peace and security in Afghanistan and the region.

Days after the Council's visit and almost immediately after the 19 January high-level meeting of the Council, regional sponsors of terrorism, through their trained violent proxies, unleashed a new wave of terrorist attacks. The sheer level of savagery in those despicable and heinous attacks was startling. Armed gunmen from the Taliban's Haqqani Network attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, killing 18, including 14 foreign nationals, and wounding many more. The subsequent week witnessed two more barbaric attacks — one in the Jalalabad compound of the international non-governmental organization Save the Children, where 27 people died, and the other was an explosives-laden ambulance detonated next to a major civilian hospital in the heart of Kabul. The blast destroyed vehicles, shops and buildings nearby, killing at least 105 civilians and injuring 235. The use of an ambulance for such a ghastly attack is a war crime under international law, including international humanitarian law. The Council condemned the attacks and cited the need to hold the perpetrators, organizers and financiers of the attacks to account. Yet, despite all of the evidence linking those attacks to regional sponsors, the question once again is, When will that happen?

Last week, Afghanistan convened the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. That marked a major development in the context of peace efforts aimed at ending the conflict and achieving a credible and just peace that conforms to the aspirations of all Afghans. In recognition of our people's demand for ending violence, President Ghani reached out to the Taliban in an unprecedented manner, calling for direct talks without preconditions. Should his call receive a positive response, the Taliban will be granted the chance to become normal citizens, to

compete peacefully in politics through democratic procedures, to be relieved of Security Council sanctions measures and to enjoy the benefits of other positive measures. In turn, they will have to give up their long-standing path of violence. Moreover, our peace process aims to protect and expand, not diminish, the rights of our people, especially women. The time is now for the Taliban to respond affirmatively and seize the historic opportunity before them. We are inspired by the international community's level of support for our new peace plan. The conference renewed the call for tangible measures for combating terrorism, in accordance with obligations stipulated in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and various Security Council counter-terrorism resolutions. We hope that States that have failed in that endeavour will adopt a new approach based on express commitments for the benefit of regional security.

For too long, the debate on State-sponsored terrorism has been kept away from international forums, including the United Nations. Beyond the intelligence networks, the rest of the world knows little about the behaviour of that aspect of terrorism at national, regional and international levels. The regional State sponsors of terror outfits exported to our country have recently pursued new methods of denial and belligerence by using reverse psychology and attempting to distort narratives. Irrefutable evidence of complicity in facilitating safe havens and logistical support to terrorists has been responded to by failed methods of counter-narratives, accusing Afghanistan of "providing safe havens to terrorists". Exploiting the democratic political dynamics of Afghanistan, they attempt to sow discord among our people, victimize our refugees by unfairly linking them to terrorism and portray their orchestrated terror attacks as civil war.

Meanwhile, according to the latest United Nations report, we have suffered more than 10,000 civilian casualties yearly over the past four years, mainly due to terrorist attacks plotted beyond our frontiers. In their desperation, they do not even hold back from such heavily risk-prone attempts as to abuse and manipulate ironclad and all-weather friendships in international relations, in favour of concealing the evidence of their sponsorship of terrorism, obfuscating facts and distorting narratives at regional and global forums.

In the light of increased terrorist activities around the world, the time has come to openly debate the regional State sponsorship of terror outfits exported to our country and let the world know more about its behaviour. The Kabul Process is not just about outreach to the Taliban; it is about ending the conflict, achieving peace and preserving the democratic order, for which numerous Afghans and allies have sacrificed their lives. Moreover, the Taliban should not be permitted to misuse the opportunity they have been presented, as they have done in the past.

As we grapple with security challenges, we are working to achieve the important objectives stipulated in the agreement that founded the National Unity Government of Afghanistan, witnessed and welcomed by the international community. That is essential for our national unity and political stability, as it is for the success of our new peace plan. The effort is carried out within the parameters of a broad-based dialogue with a view to advancing the national interests of Afghanistan, in conformity with the spirit of our Constitution. Our overall objective is to advance national unity and strengthen social cohesion and inclusivity to achieve a just and peaceful society, fully grounded in the rule of law, where our youth can fulfil their national aspirations. We are confident that our efforts will soon yield positive outcomes.

On today's special occasion, I reaffirm the National Unity Government's commitment to empowering the role of women in all facets of our society and politics. Ms. Sarabi's briefing offered a clear perspective on progress made in terms of the benchmarks of our national strategy, resolution 1325 (2000) and the challenges ahead of us. We now have female ministers, deputy ministers, members of Parliament, peacemakers, civil society activists and ambassadors serving as proactive agents for the development of Afghanistan. Two weeks ago, at a historic event, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah represented Afghanistan at the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. That symbolized Afghanistan's overall commitment to the principles of universal human rights. Despite progress, we know that our achievements in the area of the promotion and protection of human rights need to be consolidated as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General with regard to civilian casualties documented by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which I mentioned earlier.

Against all odds, Afghanistan has progressed steadily on the path of economic cooperation, increased regional connectivity and shared prosperity. We have expanded multidimensional relations with our Central

Asian neighbours, thereby resulting in numerous agreements in the areas of trade, connectivity and economic cooperation. The inauguration of Afghanistan's segment of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline in Herat by President Ghani and leaders and senior officials of Pakistan, Turkmenistan and India, following more than a decade of preparatory work, has generated new incentives for cooperation and opportunities for fostering mutual trust and confidence. Additionally, other regional projects aim to boost productivity and economic cooperation for common gains. We are looking forward to the forthcoming ministerial conference on Afghanistan to be held in Tashkent.

We wish to expand relations with all partners, including the United Nations. We are grateful for the crucial assistance role of UNAMA, which has been a catalyst for bringing change to the lives of our people. We welcome the renewal of UNAMA's mandate through the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018) and underscore once again the imperative of implementing the one United Nations approach for achieving optimum efficiency and coherence. Let me reconvey our appreciation for the dedicated efforts and leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto — a dear friend.

Combating the illicit network of narcotics, money-laundering, and terrorism finance remains a key priority for us. Based on our national drug action plan, we have continued eradication operations, and opiate seizures have reached their highest levels since 2012. We will continue to increase cooperation with our allies to strengthen the relevant law enforcement agencies, foster greater intelligence-sharing and set up effective mechanisms to curtail drug trafficking.

Additionally, refugee repatriation from neighbouring countries remains operational. We are working in close collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to provide assistance and much needed services to that vulnerable group. We call for continued international support for the joint humanitarian response plan for the period from 2018 to 2021, which requires $437 million for 2018 to assist 2.8 million people in need. However, security and durable peace are fundamental solutions to addressing that humanitarian challenge, and require comprehensive national, regional, and global commitment and action.

Lastly, in two weeks's time, 21 March will mark the beginning of Nowruz — the Afghan New Year. We are beginning this new spring season with hope, determination and confidence. As international pressure to address the root causes of violence in our country intensifies, our defence and security forces stand as capable as ever to protect and defend Afghanistan against international terrorism. Given that, we have taken a historic step towards the restoration of durable peace in our country. In that light, we look to our international partners, including the Council, to remain at our side in that endeavour.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

We are discussing the situation in Afghanistan on an important historic day. On this day 110 years ago, 15,000 female workers marched through the city of New York demanding their rights. It is therefore a particular honour for me to speak before the Security Council today, which marks International Women's Day.

For a long time, the Council has been attentive to women and peace and security. On 31 October 2000, the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on that very subject. The Netherlands was then, too, a non-permanent member of the Council, and we contributed actively to its adoption (see S/PV.4213). The resolution is a political framework, thereby making clear that without women, peace will not stand a chance or thrive. It is a also clear acknowledgement of how women and girls often suffer and are particularly vulnerable in times of war and conflict, but it is also concerns their role, leadership and responsibility in bringing about lasting peace.

Every country was encouraged to draw up a national action plan. A minority of 73 countries has done so, including, notably, Afghanistan with its very active Afghan women leaders' network. Worldwide, however, a great gap remains to bridge between the norms established for women and the bitter reality that women face, especially, but not only, in conflict situations. There continues to be an overwhelming lack of negotiations in which women play a meaningful part, let alone a leadership role, but resolution 1325 (2000) is not only about political participation or representation. It is also about the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, especially in conflict situations. That is the responsibility of us all — not only that of Member States, the United Nations and

non-governmental organizations, but of citizens in general. There should be no room for complacency, let alone impunity. There must be zero tolerance in every situation regardless of the circumstances.

For women in Afghanistan, there are also rays of hope. In the days of Queen Soraya, in 1919, Afghan women were allowed to vote significantly earlier than in many other countries. In modern-day Afghanistan, First Lady Rula Ghani successfully has advocated for women's rights. We hear of female judges and women in Government as ministers, deputy ministers, parliamentarians, and female police officers as was mentioned earlier. From 2013 to 2017, the female literacy rate nearly doubled. Statistics, however, also show that much remains to be achieved, especially for women and girls in rural areas.

The courageous filmmaker Roya Sadat sold her wedding jewellery and an apartment to make a movie that speaks to gender inequality and specifically brings the issue of violence against women into the open, which was a courageous decision. The brave women in the film show us that with perseverance and will power almost anything is possible. For many Afghan women, however, their own situation remains too dire to overcome by themselves. Facing violence, exclusion and discrimination, they will continue to need our support and helping hand in pursuit of needed assistance.

It is clear that many positive changes, some of which were mentioned earlier this morning, have taken place in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime. At the same time, many of the reforms remain vulnerable, occasionally fragile and by no means irreversible. As we all know, Afghanistan continues to face many problems, including high levels of violence, violent attacks, poverty, corruption, discrimination and, above all, the lack of opportunities for young people — the new generation. Therefore, as we have just renewed UNAMA's mandate through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), I should like to offer a couple of recommendations.

First, we can build peace only through inclusive negotiations led by an inclusive Afghan Government. The right instrument — the Kabul Process — is in place. It is both Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, and it is a peace and reconciliation mechanism. It deserves our support. Last week's gesture for peace made by the Afghan Government at the second Kabul Process conference was an important step in the right direction. The message is clear. The Afghans are taking the lead, and we will continue to support them. Afghanistan needs a functioning security apparatus and a workable and inclusive peace deal. That is no small task, and it will require continued political courage, perseverance and assistance.

Secondly, the international community should focus its energy on supporting the peace talks. Clearly, the solution has to be political. It will not be possible without true commitment and constructive engagement from all regional partners, and donor countries should be expected to unify their efforts in this regard. All too often, donors — and here we have to look at ourselves — have parallel and sometimes conflicting goals or objectives. Yet there is an obvious solution: for the Afghan Government to set the priorities and UNAMA to coordinate the One United Nations response effectively, inclusively and efficiently.

Thirdly, for Afghanistan to emerge sustainably from conflict, there is a need for a truly integrated approach, one that strengthens coherence between all sectors: political, security, development and human rights, central to all endeavours. This requires creative thinking, including in and by the United Nations system, supported first and foremost by the Security Council, but also the Member States. We should work jointly in the prevention of conflict and in support of durable peace and inclusive prosperity.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will remain a reliable and constructive partner for Afghanistan, focused not only on the security sector but also more broadly, and we have done so for 17 years. We strongly support the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and we will live up to our promise to allocate 50 per cent of our support on budget, in close cooperation with other partners.

Having said all this, I will now conclude. The progress made in Afghanistan over the past 17 years is impressive. I commend the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto and the outstanding efforts and hard work of his team. I also very much welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to host the ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. I am confident that the Council will continue to support Afghan-led efforts to achieve peace, bring about and nurture stability, and reinforce inclusive, rights-based development in Afghanistan, a process that should be

aimed particularly at achieving all gender objectives and goals.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Söder (Sweden): Madam President, I wish to thank you for having convened today's briefing on Afghanistan, with a necessary focus, on International Women's Day, on women and peace and security.

The correlation between gender equality and peaceful societies is clear. Afghanistan will not achieve the peace and development that its people so strongly desire without unleashing and embracing the agency of Afghan women.

I align myself with the statement to be made later on behalf of the European Union and its member States. I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his comprehensive briefing and to express appreciation for the very important interventions by Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi.

Sweden is a long-term donor to Afghanistan. We were a participant in the Resolute Support Mission, and we follow developments very closely. Today I will dedicate my intervention to women's issues. That does not mean that the other aspects of the very difficult situation in Afghanistan are forgotten.

While there have been genuine improvements in women's enjoyment of their human rights over the past 15 years, more is needed, as Afghan women continue to seek to play their role in society. This is a particularly critical moment for women's participation in shaping the future of Afghanistan.

As the country prepares for elections in 2018 and 2019, we expect the Government and the electoral management bodies to take all steps necessary to develop and implement gender-sensitive security and election plans, so as to enable an environment in which both women and men can safely run for elected office, campaign freely and vote, not least in remote and rural districts.

Let me commend the Government's continued efforts to realize its vision for peace. This is essential given that, as we have heard, violence by terrorist groups must be stopped, and the solution to the conflict can only be political. We commend the hosting of the second meeting of the Kabul Process last week. During the meeting, the Government presented a constructive road map for peace. We call on the Taliban to engage in a dialogue on the road map. In order to ensure the legitimacy of the peace process, it must be inclusive and uphold all of the achievements made over the past decades. Regional actors are expected to make their contribution to the peace endeavours. This is decisive in the fight against terrorism and in breaking the vicious circle.

In each of our Council meetings, we must reflect on how the women and peace and security agenda translates into real change. We must build on the knowledge that the slogan "more women, more peace" is certainly true. On the basis of the principles of our feminist foreign policy, we want to highlight the "four R's": rights, representation, resources and a reality check. I would like to briefly highlight four areas in which increased efforts could make a real difference for Afghan women.

First, it is about safe access to health care and education.

Secondly, it is about investing in women, not least in the national action plan on women and peace and security, in accordance with resolution 1325 (2000).

Thirdly, violence against Afghan women and girls is a grave violation of their human rights and must be ended. In this regard, Sweden supports Women for Afghan Women, which works to fight gender-based violence with shelters, family counselling and mediation.

Fourthly, women should be present across the whole of Afghan society. We are encouraged by the improved gender equality in business, civil society, the civil service, the judiciary, the police and the army. Women should never have to fear making their contribution to society.

Today's briefers, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi, have devoted much of their professional lives to women's participation. They have demonstrated that Afghanistan does not lack strong female leaders; yet they are not often enough at the table when decisions about peace and security are being made. Sweden will continue our dialogue and mediation training of local female actors to build their capacity to lead in local peace and reconciliation efforts.

Let me commend the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as penholder, on today's adoption of resolution 2405 (2018) and for the constructive manner in which it conducted the negotiations. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) plays a critical role in support of national efforts towards a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. This is also true of women's roles and for the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000).

The Council now need to back up and support UNAMA as it carries out its work at this critical time. The renewed mandate must now also be backed up with adequate and sustainable resources in order for the Mission to fulfil its mandate.

After years of conflict and violence, Afghanistan has reached yet another milestone. Elections are around the corner, and the outlines of a path to peace are on the table.

The potential for peace must be fully realized with the meaningful participation of Afghan women.

Ms. Andreyeva (United Kingdom): I would like to pay tribute to my Dutch colleagues for their tireless efforts to reach a consensus on the important resolution 2405 (2018), adopted today. I would also like to thank all of our briefers and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Yamamoto, for his briefing and for his and his team's continued efforts in challenging circumstances.

I am delighted to share the Chamber with so many women on International Women's Day. I am especially pleased that we are discussing Afghanistan today, as I had the privilege to spend several years in Afghanistan working to support education for Afghan girls and a future in Parliament for Afghan women. As Ms. Safi and Ms. Sarabi have demonstrated in their briefings and their own impressive work, women have a vital role to play in securing Afghanistan's future, and we should all stand beside them. Afghanistan cannot find lasting peace with only half its population. The United Nations must maintain a strong role in promoting and protecting the rights of women across Afghanistan and continue to support the Afghan Government in implementing its national action plan on women and peace and security.

Ensuring accountability and equal access to justice for all are essential to long-term peace and stability. We welcome the adoption of Afghanistan's revised penal code and the clarity it brings. We encourage the Government of Afghanistan to ensure its full implementation in line with the law on the elimination of violence against women, which we hope will continue to be used to guarantee Afghan women the protection and accountability they deserve.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is an essential mechanism in supporting Afghanistan's recovery from conflict. The continued presence of UNAMA and the resolve, resourcefulness and skill with which its staff support the Afghan people are a strong signal of the international community's commitment.

The United Kingdom welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to host a ministerial conference on Afghanistan in Geneva on 28 November. Implementing the findings of the strategic review and the Secretary-General's report of August 2017 (S/2017/696) will allow UNAMA to be as efficient as possible and to adapt as circumstances change. I am pleased to see that this is reflected in resolution 2405 (2018), adopted today, and I hope it will send a strong signal to the Mission's hard-working personnel that we fully support them.

UNAMA's mandate to support peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan remains at the core of the Mission. That will be delivered sustainably only through a credible, inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process where all Afghan citizens, whatever their background, can resolve grievances through dialogue. Of course, for peace to be sustainable it must be inclusive. The sharp focus on the involvement of women in peace and security in this mandate renewal is particularly welcome.

With inclusiveness in mind, we highly commend the bold offer laid out by President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and Afghanistan's National Unity Government at the recent meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation. We welcome the credibility, flexibility and openness of the offer, which gives the Taliban the opportunity to be part of a political process towards peace. While the Council was not able to reflect those recent developments in the mandate renewal, I hope we will find another opportunity to endorse it and to lend our full support to those Afghan-led efforts.

Finally, the United Nations must play a strong role in supporting free and fair elections. Elections, both this year and next, are an opportunity for the nation

to communicate its aspirations to the political parties. Those elections are a crucial point at which political trust can be renewed and stability forged. We commend the progress made by Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission towards electoral reform and we encourage it to redouble its efforts to ensure that voter registration is completed according to agreed timelines. We hope that UNAMA will support those efforts fully.

In conclusion, we fully support UNAMA, and we welcome the renewal of its mandate today. As a Council, we have collectively endorsed the importance of inclusion, including of women, and of upholding and promoting human rights. We call on all parties to engage meaningfully in a political process to bring lasting peace and stability to the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to welcome you to New York, Madam President, and thank you for presiding over today's open debate.

Today marks International Women's Day. At the outset, I would like to extend to you, Madam President, and the other female colleagues present my greetings for the holiday. On this special occasion, we must remember the female Blue Helmets who are serving the peacekeeping cause. As the Council knows, when Chinese people strive for a better life, women hold up half of the sky. Chinese women are contributing to world peace. At this very moment, in Juba, South Sudan, 14 female peacekeepers are working hard in the infantry, under the leadership of their team leader, to help women and children. I would like to take this opportunity to convey to them and all female peacekeepers my highest regards.

I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his briefing and thank Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their presentations. China listened attentively to the statement made by the representative of Afghanistan.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan have a direct bearing on the well-being of the Afghan people, as well as on security, stability and prosperity in the region. The international community should continue to provide robust support to Afghanistan to respond to challenges in the political, economic and security fields. As a traditionally friendly neighbour of Afghanistan, China supports the country in achieving peace, security, stability and development as soon as possible. Afghanistan is an important country on the route of the Belt and Road Initiative. Resolution 2405 (2018), which was just adopted by the Council, once again pointed out that all parties should take advantage of the One Belt One Road Initiative to promote economic development and regional cooperation in Afghanistan and help Afghanistan achieve stability and prosperity and should make concerted efforts to create a community of shared future for humankind through dialogue and coordination. In accordance with the provisions set out in the relevant Council resolutions, China will continue to work with all parties to help Afghanistan take advantage of its comparative advantages at the national level, participate in regional economic cooperation and connectivity and achieve economic and social development.

Advancing national reconciliation is the fundamental way to resolve the question of Afghanistan. China strongly supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and reconciliation. We commend the Afghan Government for its efforts to promote peace talks. We also support the Afghan Government in unveiling its reconciliation plan as soon as possible and reaching agreement on national reconciliation with armed rebel groups, including the Taliban, and launching the peace process.

China actively participated in the international meeting on the Kabul Process in February. We will continue to make unremitting efforts to push forward the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan. We stand ready to join the international community to create a favourable external environment for peace talks between the Government and the Taliban and contribute to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Improving the security situation serves as a basis for achieving stability in Afghanistan. China supports the country in strengthening capacity-building in the security sector. We have taken an active part in regional counter-terrorism cooperation. In November 2017 China, Afghanistan and Pakistan held trilateral Vice-Foreign Minister consultations on countering terrorism. We are now consulting on a trilateral memorandum of understanding on counter-terrorism and cooperation.

In December 2017 China hosted the first Foreign Ministers dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan. We are ready to continue to take advantage of mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Afghanistan contact group, engage with countries of the region, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, combat

terrorism, address threats from terrorism and safeguard regional peace and stability.

Finally, I would like to point out that China commends the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on its work and supports its positive role in helping Afghanistan to promote a political process that safeguards national security, fosters economic development, enhances its governance capacity and provides support to the upcoming Afghan parliamentary and district council elections. China will continue to support UNAMA and Special Representative Yamamoto in their efforts.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Madam President, for convening today's meeting. We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto for his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan.

We welcome in particular Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. We salute all women on International Women's Day and reiterate our commitment to the Security Council's women and peace and security agenda. It promotes the protection of women in situations of conflict and during humanitarian crises, their empowerment and their participation in peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts. We thank Mrs. Habiba Sarabi and Ms. Mariam Safi for their briefings and for their efforts in support of women's rights and participation and their leadership on the path to lasting peace in the country.

During the Council's visit to Afghanistan in January, we were able to see the commendable efforts of the Government, the First Lady of Afghanistan and women's organizations to promote peace and stability. As we renew the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), we would like to acknowledge its efforts in support of Afghan women. Similarly, we would like to recognize the efforts of the Netherlands as penholder to strengthen its mandate in support of the national plan on women and peace and security and to highlight the importance of funding its implementation.

Peru pays close attention to, and is concerned about, developments in Afghanistan. We must condemn ongoing violence committed by terrorists, in particular the recent attacks in Kabul and Jalalabad, and extend sympathy and solidarity to the victims. We believe that it is crucial to investigate and punish according to the rule of law and due process all terrorist acts and activities. The Taliban, including the Haqqani Network, Al-Qaida and Da'esh, must be held accountable for the crimes they commit. We also believe that it is important to strengthen efforts to address corruption and pay special attention to illicit drug trafficking. In many cases, such scourges benefit terrorist groups, undermine institutions and weaken the social fabric of the country.

Given the clear deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, we highlight the importance of preserving stability in order to make headway in fostering political dialogue and national reconciliation, holding inclusive elections in 2018 and 2019 and achieving lasting peace. Peru supports the Kabul Process, which was developed and led by Afghans, and supports greater participation from women and young people. We welcome efforts to begin peace negotiations. We hope that the counterparts will commit in good faith to the process of reconciliation.

We would like to underscore the importance of international, regional and bilateral support and cooperation for the Afghan process. We highlight in particular the efforts of UNAMA and the support of Central Asian States, as well as the initiative put forward by the People's Republic of China to establish a trilateral dialogue with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In conclusion, as we celebrate women and their struggle, we would like to underscore the words of Secretary-General António Guterres: women's participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/165) on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). We also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto for his briefing. As we mark International Women's Day, reflecting on the important role of women in peace and development and in the overall political process in Afghanistan and elsewhere in our debate today makes it all the more timely and relevant.

We thank the Dutch presidency for taking this initiative and we are pleased to see you, Madam Minister, personally presiding over today's debate. We thank Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam

Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their briefings.

Afghanistan still faces multiple and complex challenges to its security, stability and development. Its people continue to pay a heavy price because of the instability and violence affecting the country. As the report of the Secretary-General highlights, it is particularly women and children who constitute the most vulnerable segments of the society.

We take note of the efforts being exerted by the Government to improve the plight of Afghan women, including by implementing the law on the elimination of violence against women, as well as upholding resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. As highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General, we believe the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security will go a long way in promoting the full and effective participation of Afghan women in the country's peace and reconciliation endeavours.

Once again, we take this opportunity to express our sympathy and solidarity with the people and the Government of Afghanistan following the loss of innocent lives, including women and children, as a result of the recent suicide attacks in Kabul and Jalalabad. We hope those who committed those atrocious crimes will be held to account.

No doubt, the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan can be ensured only through a comprehensive and inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation and political process. In that regard, the renewed call made by the Afghan Government for unconditional peace talks with the Taliban and the outlining of a framework for peace presented at the second conference of the Kabul Process are encouraging. We fully support the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and appreciate the Government's offer for peace with the Taliban. We hope the Taliban will respond positively to that call and engage in direct talks with the Government with a view to achieving a political settlement and restoring lasting peace and security in Afghanistan. The support of regional and international stakeholders is key to the success of the peace process. We welcome the declaration adopted on 28 February, which reiterates the support of the international community to the Kabul Process for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process and reaffirms the commitment to the necessary fight against terrorism in order to bring about lasting peace, security, stability and prosperity to Afghanistan.

With regard to the political situation in the country, the tension between the Presidential Palace and Jamiat-e-Islami is a matter of concern, which could potentially undermine the National Unity Government and upset the already fragile political arrangement, as the report of the Secretary-General notes. We hope that the parties will resolve the dispute peacefully and expeditiously and redirect their efforts towards addressing the multiple challenges facing Afghanistan.

The holding of peaceful and democratic parliamentary and district council elections within the set time frame is indeed very important, and we note that some progress has been made in preparation for the elections. Accelerating such efforts and building the confidence of the Afghan people in the electoral process through the involvement and participation of all the relevant stakeholders will be key to ensuring the timely and successful holding of the elections.

Without sustained and inclusive economic growth and development, the peace and security challenges faced by Afghanistan cannot be effectively addressed. That is why the Unity Government needs the coordinated and comprehensive support of the international community to advance its political reform and national development priorities, as envisaged in the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework. It is vital that the international community sustain its engagement and deliver on its various commitments in that regard.

Given all the points I mentioned, the efforts of UNAMA in promoting and in supporting the initiatives for peace talks, reconciliation, dialogue and support for social and economic development, with full respect for the country's sovereignty and leadership, remain very important. We therefore welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), which renews the mandate of UNAMA for another year.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): Allow me to start by thanking you, Madam President, for presiding over today's meeting. We greatly appreciate it. I would also like to commend the Kingdom of the Netherlands for its efforts as penholder in today's adoption of resolution 2405 (2018). I appreciate the presence of our briefers: Special Representative Yamamoto, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi. Their briefings described many positive

developments, and we should continue along those lines. Allow me to share some of Poland's thoughts.

Poland strongly supports the fundamental role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its personnel in supporting Afghan society, promoting and monitoring human rights, encouraging peace and reconciliation and providing valuable assistance to the Government of Afghanistan. I would like to align myself with the statement of the European Union (EU), to be delivered later.

We welcome the Kabul Process on peace and security cooperation as a prospective framework, bringing together a number of regional and international participants, including the United Nations and the EU. We believe that the initiative will give new impetus to the efforts and lead to a peaceful and prompt settlement of the conflict. In that context, following consultation, of course, with the female members of the High Peace Council, we call on the Afghan Government to put in place clear procedures for how to engage and to include women in peace negotiations with the Taliban and other parties to the conflict.

The fight against the Taliban greatly affects women, since they make up 12 per cent of the conflict-related civilian casualties. Consequently, it is women's rights that are violated the most by the presence of the Taliban in communities. At the same time, women frequently have better access to certain populations and locations and can gather critical information about threats to security. They can also improve the relationship of the security forces with local communities and can detect early signs of radicalization, since they are often the first targets of fundamentalists. However, Afghan women do not have a significant role in decision-making, including on how to combat the Taliban at the local and national levels. We appreciate the fact that the percentage of women in the High Peace Council has increased to 20 per cent, including at a senior level and in the provincial peace committees across the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. However, women's voices are missing in the actual talks and negotiations.

While we recognize the Afghan Government's efforts to strengthen the engagement of women in the police and security sectors, many challenges remain in that area. Further work is needed to develop clear procedures on how to increase the number of women in the leadership and management of the security sector. The process cannot happen without the active participation of civil society organizations led by women. In that connection, we recognize the important role played by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and other United Nations entities in supporting the empowerment of Afghan women. Moreover, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the positive impact and ongoing significance of the international commitments made at the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016 and its important influence on security, development and stability in Afghanistan.

The protection of civilians and compliance with the obligations under international humanitarian law remain a serious problem, causing innocent people to suffer the effects of the military conflict in Afghanistan. As the 2017 annual report on the issue showed, there is still significant room for progress. Poland strongly supports the efforts of UNAMA to limit civilian casualties, in particular among children, who are severely affected by unexploded ordnance.

The upcoming parliamentary and district council elections represent a significant task for the Afghan political system on its path to an inclusive and transparent outcome. Poland hopes that the new Parliament will create a strong legislative foundation for the sustainable development of the country. In terms of technical support, we encourage UNAMA to provide the necessary assistance at the request of the Afghan authorities. The broad participation of women, both as candidates and as voters, remains a high priority for us.

In conclusion, I would like once again to commend the work of UNAMA, and in particular Mr. Yamamoto.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My country appreciates your effective presence, Madam President, in presiding over the meeting today, which is International Women's Day. We also welcome the presence of Ms. Julie Bishop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, and Ms. Annika Söder, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, at the meeting this morning.

My delegation thanks Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA), for the quality of his briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the

Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for the relevance of their interventions and for their ongoing commitment to making women's voices heard in the democratic process in which their country is engaged.

Côte d'Ivoire deplores and condemns the wave of violence and the series of deadly attacks recently endured by Afghanistan. The three attacks that took place between 20 and 27 January in Kabul and Jalalabad call on us all to push the Council to pay sustained attention to the situation in the country, given its impact on the stability of the entire region.

Despite the worrisome security situation, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the holding, on 28 February in Kabul, of the second conference of the Kabul Process on peace and reconciliation as an important step on the path to peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. My country sees President Ashraf Ghani's extended hand to the Taliban as a decisive step towards frank negotiations between his Government and the Taliban. Côte d'Ivoire remains confident that this offer of peace will lead to the establishment of a genuine inclusive peace process.

We should also like to see an assessment of the progress made in the area of peace and joint measures to combat terrorism in Afghanistan and the region. In that regard, my country encourages Afghan stakeholders to engage in an open dialogue, based on the achievements of the 2004 Constitution, including respect for the rights of citizens, especially those of women. Notwithstanding the sense of hope emanating from the second meeting of the Kabul Process, my delegation remains concerned by the persistence of some political tensions in the country. It therefore urges the parties to prioritize dialogue in the interest of the Afghan people.

On the occasion of the celebration of International Women's Day, aimed at promoting women's rights and the fight against inequality, Côte d'Ivoire would like to pay a warm tribute to Afghan women for their important contribution to the process of reconciliation and peace efforts in their country in a sometimes difficult socio-political context, in which the debate on the place of women in society remains a particularly sensitive subject.

My country calls on the international community and our Council to give Afghan women the necessary means to consolidate their place in society and promote their participation in regional and international initiatives for peace, while strengthening the protection of their most basic rights. To that end, my delegation welcomes the adoption of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Afghan Government's July 2015 launch of a national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. Côte d'Ivoire calls for the establishment of a financing mechanism for the plan in order to give Afghan women their rightful place in their country's consolidation of democratic institutions.

In conclusion, my delegation urges the international community to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to restore lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): I thank you very much, Minister Kaag, for using the occasion of International Women's Day to highlight the critical importance of including women in Afghanistan's political process. In addition, it is truly a pleasure to see you, Madam, presiding over the Security Council today on behalf of the Netherlands. I am inspired as I look around the Council table at the women leaders you have assembled for this discussion, and I hope this will serve as a reminder that we all need to do more to ensure that women are fully represented and empowered in efforts to promote peace and security in the field.

I thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing and continued leadership, as well as all the efforts of his team in support of peace and economic development in Afghanistan in a very challenging environment. We again express appreciation for the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/696) on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) last year. We welcome the adoption today of resolution 2405 (2018), renewing UNAMA's mandate and endorsing the strategic review's findings and recommendations. We are confident that this will enable UNAMA to pursue its work as effectively and efficiently as possible, and we look forward to the Secretary-General implementing the strategic review recommendations as quickly as possible.

I would also like to thank Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for sharing their perspectives on the important work they do in engaging women in Afghanistan's political process and society in general. I will comment more on that later.

The United States commends Afghanistan's leaders for taking a courageous stance at the Kabul

Process conference last week. They reaffirmed their clear commitment to peace and their willingness to engage. The onus is now on the Taliban to return that commitment and to demonstrate that it is ready to talk. The message in Kabul was clear. The door to peace is open; the Taliban must choose to walk through that door. The United States position, as outlined in our South Asia strategy, is unambiguous — the only way to end the conflict is through a negotiated settlement. We reaffirm our commitment to supporting direct negotiations between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

The Afghan people today are ready for peace. They understand that a peace agreement will require compromise on both sides, but they will not sacrifice their safety, legal protections or human rights to achieve peace. They will not return to the oppression and isolation of the late 1990s. The Taliban has an obligation to explain how it fits into the rapidly advancing Afghan society, where Afghan men and women are free to speak their minds, choose their leaders and help shape Government reforms. Groups and countries that provide the Taliban and another armed insurgents with weapons, money or political support are only fuelling the conflict and the environment that allows terrorism to persist and grow. We cannot be successful if the status quo is allowed to continue. We renew our call on Afghanistan's neighbours to join our efforts to bring a resolution to the conflict.

In addition to the contribution of the Kabul Process to achieving peace at the national level, it is also critically important that we continue to support the role of civil society in building and strengthening consensus for the peace process across all elements of Afghan society. International Women's Day provides us with a welcome occasion to emphasize those efforts. Ms. Sarabi's initiative with Afghanistan's re-energized High Peace Council, which established a network of women in provincial capitals to foster reconciliation, has the potential to build broad-based support for peace.

During the Security Council visit to Afghanistan in January, Ambassador Haley was encouraged by the discussions with Afghan officials on the status of women in Afghanistan. We urge the Government to continue to promote the growing role of women in Afghan society and Afghanistan's peace and political process, including as active participants in Afghanistan's upcoming elections, both as voters and candidates. The United States fully supports timely, credible and transparent elections for Afghanistan's Parliament in 2018 and President in 2019. Only the Afghan people can choose the leaders that will represent them and work together to create and sustain the conditions for peace. Those elections will be vital in the pursuit of political stability in Afghanistan.

To conclude, we are encouraged by the signs of progress we see in Afghanistan and by the brave efforts of the Afghan Government. We remain committed to supporting that progress, including through the work of the Council.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by welcoming Her Excellency Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Acting Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands. We all welcome your presence in the Chamber, Madam President. I also congratulate the Netherlands for having chosen to convene a debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) today on 8 March, International Women's Day. The Government of Equatorial Guinea expresses to everyone its most heartfelt gratitude and congratulations for the magnanimous initiative of occupying today, International Women's Day for working women, this Chamber of entrepreneurial women, whose mere attendance motivates me to send a message to all of the Government and the leaders of the world, especially the Government of Afghanistan: if we women can be sitting here today, the women of Afghanistan can too.

I also wish to convey our thanks to Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, for the comprehensive and detailed annual briefing on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan. I also thank Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council, and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their invaluable briefings in the Chamber on the situation of Afghan women.

Today we wholeheartedly celebrate 8 March, an important day for all women of the world, as it seeks to achieve gender equality and to empower women and girls — as yet unfulfilled tasks of our era and the greatest human rights challenge worldwide. Secretary-Genera Antônio Guterres affirms that idea in his 2018 message about this important day. He also stated that today we have the opportunity to transform impulse

into action in order to empower women in all contexts and, above all, to pay tribute to women activists who work tirelessly to champion women's rights and to encourage women to reach their full potential.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea, by supporting the renewal of UNAMA's mandate, fully recognizes and duly appreciates the crucial role of the Mission and of all United Nations agencies in backing the people of Afghanistan, in promoting peace and reconciliation, in ensuring and promoting human rights, in helping to improve the credibility, integrity, inclusivity and sustainability of electoral processes, and in improving the coordination of assistance of the international community in Afghanistan.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165) indicates that the number of civilians that have lost their lives has decreased by 9 per cent as compared to 2016. Nevertheless, we are concerned because we continue to see appalling statistics of civilian deaths and wounded in 2017 and in 2018 thus far. We are troubled that the rate at which women are killed or injured is on the rise and that grave injuries are inflicted on civilians by constant suicide bombs attacks and other attacks with improvised explosive devices, which disproportionately affect women, boys and girls. Attacks on public places, as we witnessed in the attacks carried out in January, are particularly unsettling. As such, we call on all parties to the conflict to take all the necessary measures to protect the civilian population, especially women and children, in line with international humanitarian law and the basic norms of human rights.

Sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in Afghanistan continues to be a global concern. Although sexual and gender-based violence, including the practice of bacha bazi, has been outlawed, such crimes regrettably continue to be committed without adequate legal remedy. The entry into force of the criminal code is a step forward, but we urge the Afghan Government to ensure its implementation, as well as the enforcement and compliance with the law on the elimination of violence against women.

The Government of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the ongoing efforts of the Afghan Government to seek appropriate strategies to put an end to the violence and to forge sustainable peace. Evidence of such efforts is the call of the Government on 28 February to initiate peace talks with the Taliban, thereby attempting to establish a framework for peace in the second conference of the Kabul Process for peace and security. Resolution 2344 (2017), adopted by the Council on 17 March 2017 (see S/PV.7902), seeks to support the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and the fulfilment of the commitments pledged in the London, Kabul, Bonn and Tokyo Conferences in order to strengthen governance and the rule of law, among other things. The resolution also urges UNAMA to collaborate in the implementation of the constitutional provisions and international treaties on the full enjoyment of the rights of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as to support Government efforts to ensuring an inclusive electoral process, including measures to allow the full and safe participation of women.

While the proportion of women on the High Peace Council rose from 9 to 20 per cent, including at its highest levels, it is also true and regrettable that in real conversations, including during the Kabul Process last year and in talks in Muscat, no women attended. As a result, our delegation urges the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that in upcoming dialogues and conversations on peace and security, women participate actively and that they be optimally represented in all State institutions and have a significant role in political decision-making — as is the case in the policies of the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that we must all take advantage of the opportunities we have before us in all contexts to add our grain of sand in order to transform the lives of women wherever they are. Now is the crucial moment to seek gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to transform the lives of Afghan women in all of its dimensions and manifestations. That is why our delegation calls upon the Government of Afghanistan and UNAMA to continue its work and to actively follow up to ensure the effective implementation of the national action plan on women, peace and security through the establishment, in due course, of strategies and mechanisms to finance the plan's budget.

John F. Kennedy said,

> "I do not say that all men are equal in their ability, character and motivation. I do say that every[one] should be given a fair chance to develop all the talents he may have."

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is symbolic that you are presiding over the Security Council's meeting on International Women's Day, Madam President, and we congratulate you and all the women of the world on this holiday. We remember your Permanent Representative's appeal for seeing as many women as possible at today's meeting, and we can see evidence of that in this Chamber. The absence of women in my delegation in no way signifies disrespect, let alone dislike. In Russia 8 March is an official holiday. Today all our women have the day off, and we are working for them.

We would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto for his thorough report on the current state of affairs in Afghanistan and Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their interesting briefings. For our part, we would like to make the following comments.

We are still very concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan. The Security Council's mission to Kabul confirmed the fact that the situation on that front continues to be very difficult. Towards the end of January, unfortunately, the country was rocked by a series of bloody terrorist attacks that took the lives of around 200 Afghan civilians and injured more than 400. The various terrorist organizations have not slowed down. Their terrorist activity continues, they are mounting systematic attacks in various parts of the country and they have maintained full or partial control of a significant percentage of its territory.

One of the serious factors in the deterioration of the situation is the activity of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Jihadists are consistently adding to the numbers of militants in the north of Afghanistan, turning the region into a springboard for further expansion, including into Central Asia. One particularly alarming phenomenon is ISIL's establishment in Afghanistan of an impressive network of militant training camps, whose trainees include citizens of Central Asian States and Russia. It is regrettable that there has still been no investigation of the fact that unmarked helicopters are transporting ISIL members and supplying them with weapons in the north of Afghanistan. This problem cannot be ignored. The situation should be thoroughly investigated and this practice ended immediately. Clearing the country's northern regions of terrorist elements will need far more decisive measures.

We supported resolution 2405 (2018), proposed by the Netherlands, on extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), taking into account the importance of the United Nations presence there. The Mission does a great deal for the country, but it is by definition incapable of being a panacea for all of Afghanistan's problems. We hope the resolution will improve its effectiveness. It is nonetheless regrettable that during the agreement on the text a number of the Russian delegation's key concerns were ignored, particularly those relating to ISIL's strengthening of its positions in Afghanistan, which I just mentioned. As experience has shown, attempts to minimize the scale of these problems can have disastrous consequences.

The terrorist threat and the narcotics problem are inextricably linked. Drugs represent a significant financial source for Afghan terrorists. According to the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, last year there was a significant increase — more than 60 per cent — in the area under drug cultivation in Afghanistan, and opium production increased by more than 80 per cent, reaching a record level, including in the northern provinces. The drug trade also continues to be a serious problem in Afghanistan itself and in its neighbours. We urge the military presences there to give greater attention to this issue, including by cooperating with regional organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). We should remember that the Kanal operation, conducted under the auspices of the CSTO, has been blocking Afghan drug-smuggling routes since 2003, and thanks to it, hundreds of tons of illegally trafficked drugs and thousands of firearms have been seized. Law-enforcement agencies from more than 20 states and many international organizations worked together to make it happen.

The fact unfortunately remains that the prolonged, large-scale presence of foreign contingents in Afghanistan has not led to an improvement in the military and political situation. Moreover, the expansion of the authority of foreign military personnel has brought an increase in civilian casualties, and there is data on this in United Nations reports. We believe that putting the emphasis on force alone is a mistake. We see no alternatives to a political process aimed at achieving sustainable national reconciliation, and if that process is going to be effective, it should be inclusive.

Attempts to marginalize specific countries in the region are counterproductive. The outside stakeholders should encourage a culture of good neighbourliness and cooperation, and an understanding of the importance of the regional dimension of the Afghan settlement.

We believe firmly that the key to stabilization in Afghanistan resides in negotiation efforts that can pave the way for the launch of a national reconciliation process, led by the Afghans themselves, as soon as possible, and we are ready to assist with this. The principle of honest and equal partnership, taking the interests of all regional stakeholders into account, which serves as a basis for the Moscow format and the mechanism of the resumed SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, is optimal for launching the negotiation process. We support Uzbekistan's initiative to hold a ministerial conference on the Afghanistan settlement in Tashkent on 26 and 27 March. We view it as part of the development of the Moscow format and the activities of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. We note the results of the second meeting of the Kabul Process on 28 February and the call to the Taliban by President Ghani of Afghanistan to begin a dialogue. We hope that the political appeals will be followed by practical steps to achieve that.

Afghanistan is on the threshold of a new election cycle. We support ensuring that parliamentary and presidential elections, which should be a powerful unifying factor for the Afghan people, are held on time. In order to do that, all of Afghanistan's political forces should hew to a balanced line that avoids polarizing society and infringing on national minority rights. Resolving the Afghan conflict, as with crisis situations in other parts of the world, requires that the key players ensure that their efforts genuinely intersect, and we are ready for that collaboration.

Ms. Cardona Moscoso (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to welcome Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to the Security Council, in her role presiding over today's important debate on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). I would also like to thank her delegation for its work in ensuring the adoption today of resolution 2405 (2018). We also thank Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the High Peace Council and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their briefings.

It is an honour for me to be able to represent Bolivian women today. The women in my country are a symbol of determination and strength, which are qualities that have long gone unnoticed. Let us remember that today is not a day of festivities, but one that commemorates the struggle for women's' rights. Bolivia pays tribute to those women for all their fortitude, in particular for moving forward in conflict situations as in the case of the women of Afghanistan. We should recognize all their work not only today — on International Women's Day. That recognition should always be conveyed, but not just in speeches, but also in the form of concrete actions that empower women. That is the best way to honour them.

The role of women is a priority component in the development and unity of Afghan society. The involvement of women in the current process is particularly relevant owing to the fact that they are often the ones primarily responsible for their families while seeking to ensure their well-being. Now, however, they are taking on leadership roles in seeking peace in Afghanistan. Our inclusion in all areas is not only required to bring about sustainable development, but also to bring about the peace and security for which we strive so mightily in the Security Council, the Organization and throughout the world. As the Deputy Chairperson of Afghanistan's High Peace Council put it, "peace without women's meaningful participation is impossible".

Bolivia wishes once again to underscore the mission undertaken by the Security Council to Kabul in January, during which we were able to witness the people work to rebuild their country. That visit reaffirmed our commitment to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, as well as to carrying out joint activities aimed at the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy so as to prevent violent extremism. Nevertheless, we must express our deep concern about the increase in violent incidents that began this year owing to the various attacks against civilians, nearly one third of whom were children. It is essential that the negotiations move forward to avoid any further undermining of a peaceful settlement in the region.

As clearly stated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165), the political volatility has been exacerbated and created a sense of insecurity in the community, particularly among the residents of Kabul, who were targeted by a wave of suicide attacks in January. The potential threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan will continue so long as the threat of terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorsan Province — which was responsible for several other attacks not only in Kabul, but also in the eastern province of Nangarhar — maintain their presence in Khorsan province and continue to resist the efforts by Afghan and international armed forces. Bolivia expresses its condemnation in the strongest terms of all terrorist acts, regardless of the group or entity that seeks to impose its ideology.

We also express our concern about the prolonged stalemate in the political dialogue between the National Unity Government of Afghanistan and the Jamiat-e-Islami political party. We believe that the time is ripe for the parties concerned to take proactive steps and move forward in view of the holding of the 2018 elections. We encourage the efforts by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan together with its Central Asian neighbours to promote mechanisms and platforms for regional, interregional and international cooperation to achieve peace, stability and long-term sustainable development, as well as actions to promote connectivity linking trade policies, finance, infrastructure improvement and trade among Afghanistan, Central Asian countries and other regions. We hope that the instability that Afghanistan is experiencing will shed its fragility so as to provide the stable environment needed for the holding of transparent and inclusive elections in the near future.

The fact that over the past several months many families have been displaced without any immediate prospect of returning to their homes in a safe and dignified manner remains an issue that the Security Council must continue to prioritize. In that regard, we call on the countries of the region to step up their commitment to share information and documentation that will ensure those people's voluntary, informed, dignified, safe and permanent return to their places of origin, and, at all costs, safeguard against a repetition of circumstances leading to their return to insecurity or areas that are inappropriate for them. Accordingly, Bolivia believes that the success of subregional, regional, interregional, and international projects, platforms and programmes must be framed by unequivocal respect for increasing the representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000).

Lastly, we urge against any military solution to the situation in Afghanistan, and we join any initiative that promotes inclusive dialogue that is predicated on respect for sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of other countries. We therefore state our full support for the Kabul Process, which, under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan, seeks to achieve peace, security and sustainability in the country for the benefit all Afghans.

Mr. Vassilenko (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I thank the Dutch delegation for convening us to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. I also express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Yamamoto, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their respective detailed briefings.

I underscore the symbolism that this debate is taking place on 8 March — International Women's Day. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all women and wish them happiness, love and prosperity.

Women play a primary role not only in prevention, but also in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and development. We recognize the importance of the role played by civil society, thanks to which women are participating at an increasing level in social spheres of every day life. We take note of the importance of a comprehensive analysis of today's topic as seen from a female perspective, as has been proposed by the presidency of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Kazakhstan commends the actions taken by the Government of Afghanistan, namely, seeking gender equality within public services; the adoption of a national plan of action, which will include developing a policy for the protection of women during crises; and the establishment of special courts to combat violence directed against women, as well as the adoption of a law on eliminating violence against women and espousing resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. We thank Ambassador Saikal of Afghanistan for his statement.

As everyone knows, this coming fall Kazakhstan will hold a conference on the expansion of women's

rights in Afghanistan, which will cover the relevant socioeconomic and political areas in the country; sharing lessons learned in the area of establishing gender equality; and implementing recommendations concerning the expansion of women's rights in the country. I would like to inform the Council that Kazakhstan has taken the initiative of continuing co-financing the education programme for Afghan citizens, together with the European Union and other partners. Within the framework of that education programme, which has raised $50 million, nearly 1,000 Afghan citizens will have pursued their education in Kazakh universities during the period from 2010 to 2021. Currently the European Union is preparing financing for the first part of a related project, which will be implemented together with UN-Women. Its goal will be to provide education for female Afghan students in Kazakhstan.

We are very concerned by violence against women in Afghanistan as well as by the growing number of deaths due to terrorist attacks and massive air strikes conducted by the army. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165), women accounted for some 12 per cent of the overall number of victims.

We support effective formats of regional and global cooperation as well as United Nations efforts in Afghanistan. We welcome the solutions that have been developed by UNAMA that are aimed at reducing the number of victims among civilians, improving their standard of living and developing the educational and medical fields. We call on all countries concerned to take part in implementing the relevant recommendations.

I should like to specify that thanks to the initiative of Kazakhstan during its presidency of the Council, a visit to Afghanistan was organized for members of the Council during which meetings were held with representatives of the Afghan Parliament and women's organizations, chaired by the First Lady, Rula Ghani. We should not forget that the number of terrorist attacks continues to grow, as shown by the attacks that took place in January and Kabul and Jalalabad, carried out by the Taliban and Da'esh.

We welcome the second Kabul Process, in which the Kazakh delegation participated. We believe that we should very carefully study the idea of beginning peace negotiations with the Taliban, as proposed by His Excellency President Ghani. It is vital to consider the following aspects in these negotiations: acknowledge the Taliban as a political party, impose a ceasefire, implement transitional confidence-building measures that will pave the way towards elections; revise the Constitution or introduce amendments thereinto; address grievances and apply the law; and release certain Taliban members from prison and remove some from United Nations sanctions lists. Political and economic problems as well as the security threats that Afghan is confronting requires the constant support of countries of the region, the international community, the United Nations and especially of the Security Council.

Kazakhstan continues to promote a model of sustainable development made up of three pillars.

First, concerning the link between security and development, we are convinced that to achieve lasting peace and security in the country, it is essential to implement development programmes.

The second pillar is a regional approach. In the context of the growing globalization of conflicts, this new approach will make it possible to confront cross-border challenges and threats, because it is impossible today to find solutions to these problems solely within the borders of one State. Proof of that was the launch on 23 February in Herat of two major transnational projects, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline and the tripartite Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan 500-kV power project, as well as the laying of fibre-optic cables and the building of a rail link between Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat.

The third major pillar is the principle of One United Nations. The growing number of conflicts and contemporary challenges requires greater coordination and efficiency in the work of the United Nations, both at Headquarters and at the regional level, especially in view of the cuts to the budget of the Organization. Without such coordination we would see a fragmentation of programmes and projects, which could be avoided by combining the efforts of the various structures and bodies of the global Organization in order to achieve sustainable development in a holistic manner rather than in a piecemeal way, focused on a specific region.

I should like to conclude my statement with a Kazakh proverb: "A woman rocks the cradle with one hand while running the world with the other".

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we welcome your presiding over this important meeting, Madam President. We thank the Special

Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Mr. Tadamichi Yamamoto; Ms. Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the Afghan High Peace Council; and Ms. Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their valuable briefings.

The State of Kuwait appreciates the work of UNAMA. We value the vital role of Mr. Yamamoto, as well as the sincere efforts and dedication of United Nations staff in Afghanistan as they support the people of Afghanistan in these difficult circumstances. We welcome the adoption today of resolution 2405 (2018), extending the mandate of UNAMA.

Over the past four centuries, Afghanistan has suffered from political and security instability that has negatively affected the lives of the people. The critical political conditions in Afghanistan require all those who are wise and all the heads of political parties to give priority to national interests over partisan ones in order to provide the Afghan people with a decent life after years of war and conflict. We in the Council must continue to step upp our efforts to support the political process and to encourage the timely holding of the parliamentary and presidential elections. I would like to address the following points.

First, concerning the political situation, we welcome the efforts of the Independent Election Commission and the progress made towards the holding of the parliamentary elections next July, despite the recent domestic unrest in Afghanistan. The Commission has continued with its work and appointed a new management structure. It has prepared the voter registry and linked it to the polling stations. It has also approved national identification cards — *tazkiras* — as part of the voter-registration process. We hope that these preparations will lead to broad participation on the part of the Afghan people. There is also a need to focus on encouraging women to actively participate in the upcoming elections.

As the parliamentary elections draw near, we note with regret the increasing political tensions among the various political parties and coalitions in Afghanistan. This puts more pressure on the National Unity Government and has led to delays in the implementation of the national reform agenda.

Secondly, concerning the security situation, the State of Kuwait supports the call of the Secretary-General to lower the level of threat in Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, the security situation in Afghanistan is unstable. Conflict continues between the Government of Afghanistan and opposition forces in most of the country. The United Nations recorded 23,744 security incidents in Afghanistan in 2017, 65 per cent of which were due to armed conflict in Afghanistan. Suicide attacks have increased by 50 per cent compared to 2016. Those figures underscore the fact that the Afghani Government and the international community are facing a very daunting task. The Taliban and Da'esh continue to launch terrorist attacks against unarmed civilians. We are all aware that those attacks have caused many civilian casualties. Last year alone, UNAMA recorded 10,453 civilians killed or injured in violent acts, in addition to damaging homes and property and the displacement of families.

Third is the issue of human rights. When we speak about human rights we should recall the fact that today's meeting coincides with the International Women's Day. Women, and mothers in particular, make up half of the society and contribute significantly to raising new generations that can shoulder their responsibilities. We believe in the great role of women in our societies. They must be guaranteed all their political and civil rights. That is a basic demand all over the world, including in Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan has taken steps to improve gender equality in the civil service. We also welcome the enactment of by the Afghan Parliament of the new Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which is awaiting the President's approval to enter into force. We appreciate and commend the efforts of the Government of Afghanistan to implement the new Law and resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. We hope that the Afghan Government will pursue such efforts in order to uphold the best interests of Afghan society.

In conclusion, the State of Kuwait believes that lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region can be achieved only through a negotiated diplomatic settlement. History teaches us that military solutions do not lead to lasting peaceful settlements. We therefore urge all parties to participate constructively in the efforts to achieve peace through diplomacy in the interests and well-being of the Afghan people. Such diplomatic efforts should be coupled with significant and genuine investment in education, with which any true societal reform begins. Many nations torn apart by war, conflict and destruction have been able to recover

and join the ranks of developed countries because they invested in the education of future generations and allocated resources to education without discrimination between men and women. I think the best way to conclude my remarks would be to quote Nelson Mandela, the late former President of South Africa, who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world".

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by warmly thanking all the speakers, and in particular Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi, for their informative briefings. I also thank the Netherlands for taking the initiative to hold this important debate on 8 March, on the occasion of International Women's Day, which is also being celebrated in French, as we heard from Ambassador Vassilenko. The country of Simone de Beauvoir, Marie Curie and Simone Veil — my country — takes this day very seriously. President Macron has made promoting equality between men and women the major cause of his five-year term. I will make four comments today on the situation in Afghanistan.

My first comment concerns the fragile security situation, which Ms. Safi described to us and which is illustrated in particular by the recent terrorist attacks on Kabul and Jalalabad and their impact on the Afghan population. France firmly condemns those terrorist attacks, which once again targeted Afghan civilians, especially women and children. We reiterate our sympathy and support for the victims of that cowardly and hateful violence and for their families.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165) emphasizes, the level of violence in Afghanistan has grown in recent months as a result of the ongoing threat posed by the Taliban and the increased presence of Da'esh, which Mr. Yamamoto mentioned just now. France calls for all parties to protect civilians and welcomes the efforts of the Afghan authorities in that regard, as well as the determination of the Afghan security forces in their fight against terrorism. France also welcomes the commitments made in Kabul on 28 February by all of Afghanistan's neighbours, and other international partners, to increasing their cooperation with the Afghan authorities in order to combat the double threat of terrorism and transnational organized crime. The ongoing efforts of the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners to fight drug trafficking deserve special emphasis and should be further strengthened, including within the framework of the Paris Pact Initiative.

Women are dying of terrorist violence in Afghanistan, but they are also victims of other types of violence related to the Afghan conflict. In particular, we condemn the executions of women ordered by the Taliban courts and the numerous cases of sexual violence, of which there have been more than 170 verified cases in 2017. We welcome the Afghan Government's launch of an action plan to eliminate early marriages for the period from 2017 to 2021, which we hope will help to end that deplorably widespread practice.

Secondly, I would like to refer to the ongoing efforts to arrive at a lasting political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Since our last debate, in December 2017 (see S/PV.8147), progress has been made with an Afghan-led peace process. The proposal for peace talks without preconditions, made by President Ashraf Ghani to the Taliban at the second Kabul Process conference on 28 February, is a positive development. Along with the countries and international organizations that are participants in the Kabul process, France supports this peace proposal, which offers the Taliban recognition as a political force. However, we also want to emphasize our demand that the Taliban renounce all violence. France welcomes the efforts of the Afghan authorities to establish a broad national consensus in support of the peace proposal and encourages them to continue along this path, particularly by working to ensure the cohesiveness of the National Unity Government and avoiding the temptation to retreat into communities or ethnic groups, as well as by ensuring women's active participation at all levels of decision-making.

With regard to that last point, we should note the significant progress that has been achieved, especially in the increase in the number of women in the High Peace Council, as Ms. Sarabi mentioned today. The gradual implementation of the national action plan on the women and peace and security agenda is essential in that respect. The time has come to make a qualitative leap and ensure that Afghan women can fully participate in all decision-making processes. That should begin, for example, with greater participation in the joint secretariat of the High Council, in which there are currently only three women. There can be no lasting peace without the active and effective participation of Afghan women in the process, and that must be an integral part of the national consensus forged during the second Kabul conference. Finally, France urges all partners in Afghanistan, especially its neighbours, to support and facilitate this inclusive peace process. The

Security Council should also make itself available in support of that process.

My third comment concerns the elections, which are the other high priority for Afghanistan in 2018 and 2019. While progress has been made with electoral reform and the preparations led by the Independent Electoral Commission, there is still a long way to go. France encourages the Afghan Government to continue its efforts to fulfil its responsibilities, with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and its international partners, in order to guarantee the holding of free, transparent and inclusive local and parliamentary elections before the end of the year. In that regard, as resolution 2405 (2018), which we have just adopted, emphasizes, it is essential to ensure that women are able to fully participate in the electoral processes as voters and candidates. That means renewed efforts to make sure that people understand the importance of everyone's vote, including through awareness-raising campaigns. That participation also means that women who have decided to run as candidates must be protected and assisted, and that those who have not yet dared to run should be encouraged to do so. On this 8 March, we also hope that the willingness of the Afghan authorities to give women their rightful place will result in equal access to education.

My fourth and last remark concerns the importance of international support, and in particular UNAMA, for Afghanistan. Following the Council's visit to Kabul in January, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), renewing the Mission's mandate, is another demonstration of the international community's unwavering support for Afghanistan. By endorsing the recommendations of the strategic review conducted in the summer of 2017, the resolution enables UNAMA to refocus on its core missions in support of peace efforts and the preparation of the elections.

I pay tribute to the remarkable work done by your delegation, Madam President, in the conduct of the negotiations and I congratulate you on this excellent result.

Finally, I welcome the Secretary-General's decision to host the next ministerial conference in Geneva in November, two years after the Brussels Donors Conference. It will demonstrate once again our collective and lasting commitment to peace, security and development in Afghanistan.

Allow me in conclusion to reiterate France's full support for the Afghan Government in the search for lasting peace for all Afghan women and men, and for United Nations personnel working in particularly difficult conditions.

The President: I remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

Ms. Bishop (Australia): After decades of conflict, the Afghan National Security Forces continue to make daily sacrifices in their efforts to protect their communities, while the Afghan people continue to suffer the ravages of terrorism and conflict. It remains vital that the international community continue to stand with the Afghan people in their efforts to defeat terrorism and pursue peaceful development.

The struggle against extremist ideology of groups like the Taliban is existential for many communities. There is no place in our world for a doctrine that defines women and girls as second-class citizens, and where young girls have their hopes and dreams crushed by an ideology that deprives them of education, respect and free will. There are many reasons for our support for the Afghan Government; however, few are as important as the future welfare of the women and girls of that beautiful country.

On this International Women's Day, we commit anew to the courageous women and girls of Afghanistan. Australia will maintain our 300-strong commitment to the NATO-led Resolute Support mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan Security Forces, and our annual $100-million commitment to its support. The Australian Government reiterates our condemnation of the actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and ISIS-inspired groups, Al-Qaida, its affiliates and other terrorist groups, including in Afghanistan. In February, Australia listed the Islamic State-Khorasan Province for counter-terrorism-targeted financial sanctions.

Since 2001, Australia has also been committed to Afghanistan's development, including by providing $1.34 billion in development assistance. Sustainable economic growth is the key to lifting more Afghan people out of poverty. We are seeing advances, with women and girls now having opportunities for education and economic participation while their rights are being

codified in Afghanistan's laws. Women, at least as much as men, must win the peace in Afghanistan, and we support their participation in the upcoming elections, both as candidates and as citizens exercising their democratic rights. More work is needed to ensure that Afghans can fulfil their potential, including those displaced due to the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Australia continues to support Afghanistan's efforts to reintegrate displaced people and returnees and to meet the humanitarian and development needs of its citizens. Today I announce a $60-million humanitarian support package to assist Afghanistan's refugees, displaced people and their host communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Australia will continue to support Afghanistan's efforts in responding to the ongoing challenges of food security, safety and health needs, particularly of vulnerable women and children.

Afghanistan needs enduring peace to fulfil its undoubted potential that can only come through negotiation and dialogue. The November 2018 ministerial conference in Geneva will provide the opportunity for Afghanistan to demonstrate progress towards a political settlement, give priority its development needs and build international confidence. The Australian Government acknowledges the commitment of the Afghan Government and people, and the bravery of the Afghan security forces in their determination to end conflict. We also appreciate the valuable contribution of all United Nations agencies, diplomatic partners and their staff in Afghanistan.

Like all people, Afghans want to live their lives in peace and security and strive for higher standards of living. We are reliable and enduring partners in the struggle to reach that goal. The men and women, girls and boys, and families of Afghanistan are counting on us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mrs. Purschel (Germany): Let me thank Mr. Yamamoto, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Ms. Sarabi, Deputy Chairperson of the High Peace Council; and Ms. Safi, Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, for their comprehensive briefings.

Germany aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union.

To start, I would like to commend the National Unity Government for holding the second Kabul Process conference on 28 February, despite the series of atrocious attacks only weeks earlier. This is a testament to the courage of the Afghan people. There is no purely military solution to this conflict. After so many years, the Taliban have achieved none of their objectives and they never will. All they can do is prolong the misery of their own people.

The only sustainable solution is a negotiated peace without losers. President Ghani's offer to enter into talks with the Taliban without preconditions is an important step towards such an intra-Afghan peace process. The participants in the Kabul conference lent their full support to this offer; now it is up to the Taliban to respond.

Furthermore, we are encouraged by the steps taken to prepare for the parliamentary and district council elections. The presentation of the voter registration concept and the appointment of a new member to the Afghan Independent Election Commission gave new impetus to the process. The postponement of the election from July to a later date in 2018 seems realistic. However, the electoral preparations must be accelerated to hold the elections within this year.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2018/165), the number of security related incidents in 2017 was the highest ever recorded. We deeply deplore the high number of civilian lives lost — especially the lives of so many children — and we condemn the particularly brutal series of attacks by anti-Government elements at the beginning of this year. The Afghan Security Forces continue to stand on the front line in this fight against terrorism. We applaud the envisaged security sector reforms that aim to improve the professionalism of the Afghan National Army, especially by retiring several hundred generals and bringing on a new generation of military leaders.

To train, advise and assist the Afghan National Security Forces, Germany intends to increase the number of its troops committed to the Resolute Support Mission by approximately 300, to a total of up to 1,300 soldiers. We will then be the second-largest troop contributor to the Mission after the United States.

We also welcome the fact that further efforts have been made to strengthen the legal and the anti-corruption framework. The recently adopted amendments to the penal code may help to reduce war crimes, and the

adoption of the Law on Declaration and Registration of Assets of State Officials and Employees will yield visible progress in fighting corruption and foster the rule of law if implemented correctly.

We thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands for putting a women, peace and security focus on today's debate. This emphasis is much welcome and important, and not just because it is International Women's Day.

I would like to commend the intention of the Afghan Government to increase the representation of women in the civil service to 24 per cent by the end of this year, in line with Afghanistan's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). At the same time, I would like to put particular emphasis on the importance of enforcing the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Too many reported cases remain unheard by the competent courts. In that context, let me also thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for its excellent work in tracking the human rights situation across the country, most recently through its annual report on the protection of civilians.

Germany continues to support UNAMA and United Nations agencies working in Afghanistan. We welcome the renewal of the UNAMA mandate today. It is particularly important that the Security Council endorse the outcome of the strategic review to give the Mission a reliable basis for planning the necessary adjustments. As on previous occasions, I would like to stress that the important tasks of the now abolished Rule of Law Unit should be fully integrated into UNAMA's core activities.

Let me conclude by inviting all participants in this meeting to a movie screening in German House today. As a concrete measure to highlight the role of women on this important day, we are proud to present the first international screening of the documentary *We the Women of Afghanistan: a silent revolution*. We are pleased that Afghanistan, Canada and the Netherlands will be there to support the event as hosts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto and the other briefers for their briefings, and Ambassador Saikal for his statement. We also thank the Secretary General for his report. (S/2018/165)

As we mark International Women's Day today, it is time to recognize and reflect on the enormous achievements of Afghan women and girls. It is truly heartening to see empowered women and girls in Afghanistan who participate in different spheres of life. They strive for and contribute to the prosperous and peaceful future of their country. They merit the admiration and full support of the international community.

We cannot emphasize strongly enough the need to consolidate the achievements of the past 17 years in Afghanistan. This requires the sustained support of the international community to the Afghan Government and people. In that understanding, we applaud the greater attention paid by the Security Council to the situation in Afghanistan. We also commend the role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in standing with the Afghan people and coordinating the efforts of the international stakeholders in Afghanistan. We will continue to support UNAMA's activities and efforts. In this context, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), renewing the mandate of UNAMA.

Afghanistan is at yet another critical juncture. Addressing the challenge of establishing sustained peace, stability and security in the country remains central. In that understanding, Turkey was represented at the second Kabul Process conference, held on 28 February. At the meeting, we reiterated that lasting peace in Afghanistan could be achieved through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. We also made a call on all the groups in Afghanistan to denounce violence, recognize the Government of Afghanistan and become part of the legitimate political life of the country. We hope that the call made at the meeting by President Ghani for peace negotiations without preconditions will receive a positive response from the Taliban. Meanwhile, we also believe that, the National Unity Government needs to be more inclusive in order to overcome ethnic tensions and garner the support of all segments of Afghan society in this critical period.

Strengthened collaboration among the countries of the region is crucial to the success of Afghanistan. Our vision for Afghanistan is a peaceful and stable country that enjoys good and cooperative relations with its neighbours, while being at the centre of major regional projects. We are confident that this cooperation could be achieved through dialogue and stronger engagement. Accordingly, Turkey will continue to contribute to

regional cooperation efforts, including through the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to standing by our Afghan sisters and brothers in their quest for a better future as long as our help is needed.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the Kingdom of the Netherlands on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are very proud of the close collaboration between our two countries in the framework of our split term. Allow me to say that it is a personal pleasure to see you in that position, Madam.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union. I wish to add some points in my national capacity.

We also welcome today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The Mission plays a vital role in the partnership between Afghanistan and the international community in the face of extremely complex challenges and difficult conditions on the ground. From its efforts to facilitate the peace process to the delicate issues revolving around electoral processes and reforms, we strongly appreciate and support UNAMA's contribution.

We condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks that have taken place in Afghanistan and its capital in the past weeks. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the Afghan Government and to the families of the victims. The intensity of the conflict remains worryingly high, with tragic effects on the population, as UNAMA's regular reporting on civilian casualties continues to assess. In this difficult context, we welcome President Ghani's courageous peace offer, as presented at the second conference of the Kabul Process, which took place last week. This offer represents a tangible demonstration that the Afghan authorities are determined to pursue the objective of peace through dialogue with insurgent groups.

The National Unity Government's proposal opens a political window of opportunity for the peace and reconciliation process, which must be explored and pursued to its fullest potential. We therefore hope that the Taliban will grasp the significance of this opening by accepting the Government's invitation to come to the table in the spirit of sincere dialogue, with the shared objective of putting an end to the conflict and thereby opening the way to a future of peace and prosperity for Afghanistan and its people.

We are aware that bringing about the conditions for a meaningful peace process is not an easy task. Every effort must be made in order to give substance to the road map. To further this objective, it will be crucial to generate a broad national consensus in support of the peace process. We therefore appreciate and encourage the commitment of the Government and its relevant institutions to maintaining and strengthening its efforts to reach out to all components of Afghan society on the basis of a truly inclusive approach.

In this context, it is essential that Afghan women be given the opportunity to play a primary and active role, first and foremost in order to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Constitution and the broader civil and social gains made in the past 16 years are protected and promoted. We strongly appreciate the Government's commitment in this regard, which should be reflected in its road map for peace.

The support of the Afghan people for the peace process will also be strengthened by the necessary cohesion between various political groups, as well as the ability of the Government to meet the needs of the population by enacting the necessary reforms. Ensuring that the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections are held in a timely, transparent and inclusive manner will certainly provide an important contribution to this goal.

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a formidable obstacle on the road to peace. A decisive, common effort against this grave threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan remains a key factor. Italy continues to play its part in this regard in the framework of the Resolute Support Mission by providing a significant contribution to strengthen the capacities of the Afghan National Security and Defence Forces.

To be fully successful in defeating terrorist groups, however, it is also necessary to bring about a close and genuine collaboration between regional stakeholders. This also applies to the fight against transnational criminal networks and drug trafficking. We therefore encourage all efforts geared towards making concrete progress in terms of a constructive dialogue and effective cooperation between neighbouring countries

on the basis of a common understanding that this kind of win-win cooperation can bring tangible benefits to all parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): This debate is taking place at an important inflection point in the 17-year history of the current conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan strongly condemns the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. There is no justification for attacks that kill or maim innocent children, women and men.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/165) paints a grim and bleak picture of the situation in Afghanistan — a continued political impasse that threatens the country's unity, an economy in stress and decline, corruption, drug production and trafficking and a security environment that in 2017 witnessed a 67 per cent spike in airstrikes, an increase in terrorist attacks and the highest number of civilian casualties ever recorded in Afghanistan. Moreover, the continuing presence of large numbers of terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan pose a threat to the long-term stability of Afghanistan, its neighbours, including my country, and the entire region.

Against that troubled backdrop, President Ashraf Ghani's recent proposal for a dignified process of talks without preconditions with the Taliban offers an opportunity to construct and initiate a credible peace process. For over a decade now, Pakistan has advocated the restoration of peace in Afghanistan through a negotiated settlement between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban. The international community has also endorsed the goal of a negotiated settlement promoted through an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process as the best, and indeed only, way to realize lasting peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Pakistan will play its part in encouraging the initiation of such a dignified negotiation process. We reiterate and renew our call on the Taliban to renounce violence and agree to join the peace talks. However, the task ahead is complex, arduous and delicate. Above all, seizing the opportunity requires an understanding that the simultaneous resort to more kinetic actions, the escalation of military force to shift the battlefield, will evoke an escalation of attacks by the insurgents and erode, rather than advance, the prospect of initiating the envisaged peace process. After 17 years, both the Afghan Government and its coalition allies, as well as the Taliban, should have learned that neither can impose a military victory on the other. The renewed escalation of force will impose further suffering on the people of Afghanistan.

Secondly, while the talks would be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, other parties involved, including the United States, would need to engage in and contribute to the negotiation process.

Thirdly, some regional Powers and Afghan parties have remained consistently hostile to reconciliation between the Afghan Government and the Afghan Taliban. The international community must oppose their anticipated effort to derail the peace process outlined by President Ashraf Ghani.

Fourthly, there is growing and widespread concern regarding the rapid increase in the presence of Da'esh in Afghanistan. A recent report notes that the Afghan Government controls only 18 per cent of the country's districts and has influence in an additional 38 per cent. The rest, sadly, is ungoverned. It is in the ungoverned and uncontested spaces in Afghanistan's north and east that Da'esh and its affiliates are installing themselves and threatening Afghanistan and its neighbours. The elimination of Da'esh and its affiliates must be accorded high priority in the endeavour to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Fifthly, the power of assorted terrorist groups and criminal gangs in Afghanistan cannot be broken when they continue to receive a steady stream of revenue from drug production and drug trafficking. The Afghan Government and its international partners must brake the nexus between drug production and terrorism.

Pakistan, my country, has the highest stake in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. My country has suffered gravely due to the decades of war, violence and terrorism emanating from our neighbouring country. Over the past four years, Pakistan has successfully turned the tide against terrorism by conducting the largest and most sustained anti-terrorism campaign anywhere in the world, with the deployment of over 200,000 of our troops. That campaign will continue until all terrorists, without distinction, are eliminated.

Today the threat of terrorism in Pakistan emanates principally from outside of our borders. As Pakistan's army chief, General Qamar Bajwa, noted in remarks to the recent Munich Security Conference, of the 131 terrorist attacks on our territory, 123 were conceived,

planned and executed from Afghanistan. That is happening despite the presence of the most powerful military alliance in Afghanistan. We want to see the elimination of the sanctuaries where those terrorists operate against my country.

Pakistan also requires effective cooperation from Kabul and the coalition forces to control and manage the long border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. My country has nearly 1,000 border posts, but on the other side there are only 220. In one stretch of 648 kilometres, there is not a single Afghan post. Yet the responsibility for containing regional terrorism and cross-border movement is placed on my country. Pakistan plans to fence and electronically monitor the entire border with Afghanistan. That project should be actively supported by the international community and Afghanistan.

My country has offered unprecedented hospitality and support to the Afghan people, our brothers and sisters, over the past several decades of their travail and tragedy provoked by internal strife and foreign military interventions. We continue to host the largest protracted presence of refugees anywhere in the world and have delayed sending them back again on compassionate grounds.

Finally, as Pakistan, the Afghan Government and the coalition work together to evolve an agreed course of action for peace and stability in Afghanistan, it is essential that all parties refrain from campaigns of vilification and coercion. Pakistan's cooperation cannot be garnered by pressure or intimidation.

To conclude, allow me to convey a message from my Government and my people to our sisters in Afghanistan. We stand with them in support of their rights and liberty. We regard an assault on their rights as a threat to our rights, and indeed to the rights of women everywhere. We are together in the pursuit of our shared goal to ensure a life of dignity and liberty for every girl and every woman, wherever they may be.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Bonser (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan on the special occasion of International Women's Day. Canada thanks the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) for keeping Member States apprised of progress made in the country. In particular, we thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing on, and tireless work in favour of, Afghanistan.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me to join others in conveying our sincere condolences to the people of Afghanistan in the wake of recent violent attacks in Kabul and across the country. We are disheartened by the toll such attacks take on civilians, in particular on women and children. While UNAMA's recent report of a 9 per cent decrease in civilian casualties in 2017 — as compared to 2016 — is an improvement, any civilian casualties are unacceptable.

There are three themes that I will address today: the peace and reconciliation process, the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of Afghan society and progress on human rights.

First, in the wake of the spike in recent violence, it is now more essential than ever that the Afghan Government, the armed insurgency and all parties in the conflict come to the table for sincere peace negotiations. In that regard, we urge the Taliban and other insurgent groups to cease to use violence and to engage in a negotiated peace. Peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan must be Afghan-owned and Afghan-led. In support of that, Canada commends both the Afghan Government for convening the Kabul Process on 28 February and Afghanistan's neighbours for their efforts to work with the Government of Afghanistan towards a more peaceful and stable region.

That brings me to my second point, namely, the inclusion of women in all aspects of society, including peace processes. For a peaceful, stable and prosperous future to be achieved, women must be included, on equal footing as men, in decision-making at all levels of politics, society and the economy. Canada's national action plan on women and peace and security recognizes that peace is more enduring, stable and inclusive when women are actively engaged in such processes. For that reason, women must be given a prominent role in peace negotiations at all levels and in all venues. As women currently hold less than a third of parliamentary seats in Afghanistan, it is especially important that we ensure women are meaningfully included as both candidates and informed voters in the upcoming elections.

The last theme I will address today is human rights. Promoting and protecting human rights, with a

focus on women and girls, is at the core of Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Although there has been notable progress made in that area, women continue to be at a disadvantage as compared to men. Ongoing violence, moreover, continues to deliberately and disproportionately target marginalized ethnic and religious groups, journalists, human rights activists and civil society organizations. That is deplorable, and has not gone un-noticed.

Canada remains committed to advancing the rights of all Afghans by helping to improve governance systems, increasing the capacity of Afghan institutions and meeting the basic needs of the Afghan people, especially women and girls. That includes supporting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces; improving access to safe, quality education and health services; and fostering greater economic opportunities. Canada, moreover, remains a significant contributor to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, a leading defender of human rights in the country.

We were pleased to see that the Council has renewed the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for a further 12 months. The Council can count on Canada as a committed partner to help Afghans create a more equitable, just and sustainable future for all. We will continue to stand-by Afghanistan in its efforts towards peace and regional stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): Since the start of this year there has been sharper focus by the Security Council on issues relating to Afghanistan. The Council members' visit to Afghanistan, the ministerial debate on Afghanistan and regional connectivity (see S/PV.8162) and the enhanced focus by the Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) on the situation in the country all bode well for the attention that the worsening situation in Afghanistan necessitates.

I thank you, Madam President, for following that welcome trend and organizing today's debate. We also thank Ambassador Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for sharing his insights on the prospects for peace ahead of us in 2018. We also appreciate the eloquent portrayals of the strides made by Afghan women and what more needs to be done in that regard.

The report (S/2018/165) of the Secretary General has highlighted what we feared. The year 2017 was perhaps the worst year in terms of civilian causalities and security incidents in Afghanistan. Thousands of innocent and precious Afghan lives fell prey to mindless violence. It is in that context that we welcome the adoption of resolution 2405 (2018), which extends the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), as an affirmation of the collective objective of support for the Afghan people. The brave Afghan people must not lose hope, and we, the international community, must not lose heart.

We specifically welcome the Council's focus on linkages among extremism, terrorism, drug production and the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Afghanistan. The increase in the cultivation of poppy in the areas under the control of the Taliban and the Taliban's involvement in virtually all aspects of the opium trade suggest that it is akin to a drug cartel. We hope that the Council will better utilize the range of tools available to it to deal with those transnational networks of drugs, terrorism and crime.

Despite the international community's efforts, those supporting the terrorists affecting Afghanistan have not been deterred. There are still those who provide sanctuaries to support the dark agendas of terrorist organizations like the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Indeed, the challenges posed by cross-border terrorism emanating from safe havens and sanctuaries to Afghanistan and to our region must be addressed.

Today being International Women's Day, we join in acknowledging that women are perhaps the worst-affected by the protracted conflict and violence in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the continuing conflict situation, Afghanistan has come a long way since the days of the Taliban, who had reduced women to less than second-class citizens under a despotic regime. Women in the country are no longer imprisoned in their homes and are making progress in all sectors, from technology to athletics and from transportation to the civil service. As we heard earlier, they are committed to continuing their struggles in order to play a significant role in building a progressive and stable society. Afghan women have achieved a lot in the two recent decades. We must not allow those gains to be lost or wasted.

India has invested over $2 billion in Afghanistan since 2002 in the reconstruction and development of the country. A major focus of our work has been on nearly 550 high-impact community development projects, which cut across areas such as education, health, agriculture and irrigation, power and energy. All of them have a direct bearing on improving the lives of all Afghans, including girls and women, specially so for projects in the education and health-care sectors.

Indian women's non-governmental orgainzations have undertaken various activities in Afghanistan such, as vocational training of Afghan women in India, as well as establishing women's vocational training centres in various provinces of Afghanistan. They have been working for almost a decade with poor women workers and sending them for training-of-trainers sessions in India. To date, 150 women trainers have been trained in India out of the target of 200 up until May 2018. In addition, more than 3,000 Afghan women have been trained in Kabul and other provinces in Afghanistan to help them to establish a women's self-help organizations in Kabul. During the past three years, about 5,000 Afghan female students have been trained under various higher education scholarship schemes. Moreover, several rural women from Afghanistan have been trained at the Barefoot College in Rajasthan, India, in the field of solar electrification. We will continue our work on the ground to help the women and girls of Afghanistan become self-reliant and capable of playing an effective part in the reconstruction of their country.

If we are to preserve the achievements of Afghan women and girls, the international community must continue to extend its full support to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. The Afghan National Unity Government recently once again issued a new call for peace and proposed a concrete approach to the Taliban to join the mainstream. The Afghan Government's willingness for peace is despite the fact that armed groups have identified themselves and demonstrated to all of us that they are the irreconcilables. Those efforts by the Afghan Government calling on the armed groups to cease violence and join the national peace and reconciliation process, which would protect the rights of all Afghans, including women, children and minorities, deserve our full support. However, it should also be clear to the armed opposition that there will be no tolerance for those who continue violence. Any violence needs a robust response. The irreconcilable guns need to be silenced.

The indomitable courage of the Afghan people, the spirit of the Afghan youth and the strength of their dreams are a source of collective pride for our region. India is committed to continuing its efforts to strengthen that spirit by supporting all initiatives designed to end violence and bring back peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Iran): I would like to express my appreciation to the Netherlands presidency for organizing today's debate. I also thank the Ambassador of Afghanistan for his statement. I would like to thank Mr. Yamamoto, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), for his briefing on the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2018/165).

Unfortunately, security remains the major challenge for Afghanistan. According to the Secretary-General's report, 2017 ended with the highest level of security-related incidents ever recorded. A wave of deadly, complex attacks, in particular three major attacks in Kabul with hundreds of fatalities, continued throughout January 2018. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province remained operationally resilient, thereby exacerbating the volatile security situation as conflict between the Government and terrorists, as well as extremist groups, continued throughout most of the country.

Iran continues to support the promotion of security and stability and comprehensive and sustainable development in Afghanistan. It supports any Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled call for a reconciliation and peace process. It is in that context that we agreed to participate in the Kabul Process — and endorsed its final declaration in February this year — and in similar processes to help achieve peace and security in Afghanistan.

The Afghan National Unity Government is in the forefront of fighting terrorism, in particular the Taliban, Al-Qaida, Da'esh and its affiliates, as well as other terrorists and extremist groups and criminals. The sustained support of the international community is needed to support the Afghan Government in that

fight and to address its complex security, economic and political challenges.

Strengthening our regional cooperation with Afghanistan is a priority and a major step towards consolidating peace and improving its economic status in the region. In that regard, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Kazakhstan for its initiative to organize a ministerial debate on regional partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia, as a model to link security and development during its presidency of the Security Council in January. The world should regard the situation in Afghanistan not as an opportunity for competition but as one to establish peace, security and stability through development — a win-win approach for Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, including those in Central Asia and the international community in general.

For more than three decades, Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees and has shared much needed subsidized goods and services with them, including basic commodities, public health and public education. This year alone, our schools are providing education to nearly 400,000 undocumented Afghan students. With that in mind, we welcome and urge further efforts to strengthen the process of regional economic cooperation, including measures to facilitate regional connectivity, trade and transit. Over a decade and in total, Iran has funded more than 300 development projects, including reconstruction and building infrastructure totalling $500 million. Such projects have the capacity to change regional economic perspectives and can help prosperity and stability in Afghanistan.

During the reporting period, trade through Iran's Bandar Abbas and Chabahar ports increased as of early 2017, marking a significant shift in Afghanistan's access to markets and international trade. The findings of the *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017* of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, indicating an 87 per cent growth in opium production, are alarming given the fact that narcotics provide a major source of income for terrorist groups. The international community must support the relevant international and regional projects and activities, including those carried out by Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, within the framework of the triangular initiative to counter narcotics.

We reiterate our support for UNAMA and United Nations agencies in their efforts to provide development and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan through a comprehensive plan. Sustained ownership and partnership with the Afghan Government are needed in order to utilize the best potential of UNAMA and the United Nations system to deliver the necessary services in priority areas, as advised by the national Government.

The General Assembly, through its resolution 64/253, recognized 21 March of each year as the International Day of Nowruz. Nowruz — "New Day" — is celebrated in many countries, including Afghanistan. Nowruz has served as the common inspiration for peace and reconciliation for more than 300 million people around the globe. On the eve of Nowruz, I would like to express my best wishes to the fraternal people of Afghanistan, wishing them a happy Nowruz, and reassure them of Iran's full support in their endeavour to reach peace and prosperity in their country.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson: On International Women's Day, and on any other day, I am delighted to see you in the President's chair, Madam.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (S/2018/165) and strategic review. I would also like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto for his briefing.

I express deep sorrow following the terrorist attacks in January, in particular the three in Kabul that inflicted hundreds of casualties, as well as the attack against Save the Children in Jalalabad. I express sincere condolences to the Afghan people and the Government for the horrific attacks against Afghan civilians and security personnel. I reiterate the EU's unwavering engagement to stand by Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism, which is a global threat. The EU calls for an in-depth investigation of those crimes and identification of the perpetrators, who must be brought to justice.

The EU strongly acknowledges the crucial role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and all the United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people. The EU wishes to have the closest and strongest relationship with UNAMA, both on the ground and in international forums, for the ultimate benefit of Afghanistan.

The EU fully supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process that will bring all Afghans together and pave the way to a better future for Afghanistan and the whole region. The EU welcomes the second meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation on 28 February as an important step towards peace and reconciliation. The European Union commends all those that made the conference possible: the Afghan Government and people, participants, regional actors and international partners. At the meeting, the Afghan Government put forward an important and welcome offer of peace to the Taliban. We encourage the Taliban to seize that offer and anticipate that it will lead towards the establishment of a genuine peace process.

On 8 February, the EU held its first meeting of the EU-Afghanistan Joint Committee under the Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development. The Cooperation Agreement came into force provisionally as of 1 December 2017 and establishes a formal bilateral relationship. Ahead of the Joint Committee, High Representative of the European Union Federica Mogherini and Afghan Minister of Finance Eklil Hakimi met and emphasized their strong commitment to bringing about peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Respect for human rights, the full and equal participation of women and democratic elections continue to be a focus of the EU's dialogue with the Afghan authorities and of the EU's actions in the country. In fact, human rights now form an integral part of the structured dialogue between the EU and Afghanistan under the framework that I just mentioned. In 2017, the human rights situation remained fragile and worrying in Afghanistan. There were positive achievements with the adoption of human rights legislation, such as the revised Penal Code and the Child Rights Protection Law.

Progress has also been noted on the implementation of the national action plan pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000) and on the elimination of violence against women, for which Afghanistan has prepared an implementation strategy. However, more needs to be done. The EU is particularly pleased that the Kabul Process conference underlined the need to safeguard the achievements made in the area of women's rights in recent years. Moreover, the elections scheduled for 2018 and 2019 must ensure the participation of women as candidates, voters or staff members, thereby safeguarding their rights as equal citizens.

The death penalty remains a topic of discussion, and the EU repeats its call for a moratorium. On the positive side, we note that, in the new Penal Code, the number of crimes to which capital punishment applies has been considerably reduced.

The EU calls for more concrete and accelerated actions to implement the anti-corruption strategy that was adopted, including an independent monitoring mechanism.

With regard to the elections, some progress has been made on the appointment of the leadership of the Independent Election Commission and on voter registration. Electoral preparations for the parliamentary and district elections must be accelerated. The EU and its member States remain committed to supporting the Afghan electoral process. The EU has committed €15.5 million to that end.

The EU and Afghanistan continue to engage in a comprehensive dialogue on migration. The implementation of the Joint Way Forward on migration issues between Afghanistan and the European Union is part of that discussion, with several planned common actions related to cooperation on addressing and preventing irregular migration and on the return of irregular migrants, the fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings and awareness-raising activities on illegal migration.

The European Commission continues to support Afghanistan through programmes for Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries to the amount of approximately €200 million. Our aim is to support a safe, manageable, predictable, voluntary and dignified return process for Afghan migrants.

In 2017, UNAMA documented 10,453 civilian casualties, which is a decrease of 9 per cent as compared to 2016. However, the persistently high levels of violence and the corresponding impact on civilians remain a deep concern to the EU.

We need to continue to protect the vital role of humanitarian agencies and to respect their impartiality and humanitarian space in addressing the most urgent

needs of the most vulnerable. In view of the threat posed by the many mines and improvised explosive devices, the EU also encourages Afghanistan to maintain the current pace of demining. We support the efforts of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission to provide further training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces and institutions.

The EU is alarmed about the sharp increase in opium production in Afghanistan by 83 per cent in 2017 as compared to 2016, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The illegal narcotics production and trade remain major critical challenges to the long-term stability and sustainability of the State, while providing significant funds to anti-Government forces and criminal networks.

To conclude, the recent meeting of the Kabul Process on peace and security was a clear offer of peace to the Taliban, and we anticipate that that offer will now lead to the establishment of a genuine peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. The EU continues to consider UNAMA a key partner in that. UNAMA has an invaluable role in ensuring the broadest possible international support for that Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. The EU will continue to support those efforts with all the means at its disposal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mrs. Van Vlierberge (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): First of all, as others have done before me, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to the Afghan people and their Government for the terrible attacks against Afghan civilians and security personnel. Belgium strongly supports the efforts of the international community to ensure security, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. Belgium has made regular and significant contributions to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund and will continue to invest in the security of the Afghan people, in particular by increasing its presence in Afghanistan from 50 to nearly 100 soldiers next month.

Belgium would like to associate itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union, in particular by highlighting the indispensable role of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and other United Nations agencies in supporting the Afghan people, promoting peace and reconciliation, monitoring and promoting human rights, and coordinating the assistance of the international community. We also commend the Government of Afghanistan for acceding to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its five Protocols on 9 August 2017, thereby demonstrating its commitment to addressing the issues covered by the Convention and its Protocols.

I would like to thank Special Representative Yamamoto, Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Safi for their briefings and for their tireless efforts towards lasting peace in Afghanistan. Allow me to thank you, Madam President, for organizing this quarterly debate on Afghanistan on such an auspicious day, International Women's Day, and only a week after the very successful second conference of the Kabul Process. Now is the best time to discuss women and peace and security in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, women continue to suffer the consequences of the conflict. Last year, the number of female deaths increased by 5 per cent as compared to the previous year. That is particularly tragic, since women also hold the key to more peace and security. Studies show that a greater participation of women leads to more effective humanitarian assistance, more lasting peace agreements and post-conflict recovery. There is a direct correlation between women's level of education and sustainable development. Encouraging women's rights and inclusion is not a matter of political correctness or moral debate but a proven recipe for success. That is why the women and peace and security agenda deserves all the support that we can collectively provide.

We take this opportunity to commend the progress made by the Government of Afghanistan. The aforementioned increase in the number of female deaths is primarily attributable to terrorist suicide bombings. The casualties attributable to the Government forces decreased by 19 per cent. Afghanistan has made clear commitments and has developed an action plan on women and peace and security. More and more women hold important Government positions. We also welcome the recent decree endorsing the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and we look forward to its implementation.

No one denies the significant challenges and the long way to go. A sustained effort will be needed to increase the essential participation of women in education, work and decision-making. The upcoming

elections will be an important opportunity to increase women's participation in public life. Women have a role to play as voters, activists and political candidates. We hope that a concerted effort by the Government, the Independent Election Commission and civil society, with the support of UNAMA, will make real progress in that area possible.

Women also played a role in the recent success of the second meeting of the Kabul Process as members of the High Peace Council or through the support of women's organizations for the peace offer put on the table. Belgium fully supports the declaration of the Kabul peace process and congratulates the Government of Afghanistan on having obtained broad national and international support for a generous and concrete peace offer. It is now up to the Taliban to answer. We also commend the Government of Uzbekistan for organizing an international conference on peace and development in Afghanistan in Tashkent at the end of this month. International and especially regional support for Afghanistan's peace process and development is essential for achieving sustainable progress.

The meeting rose at 1.50 p.m.